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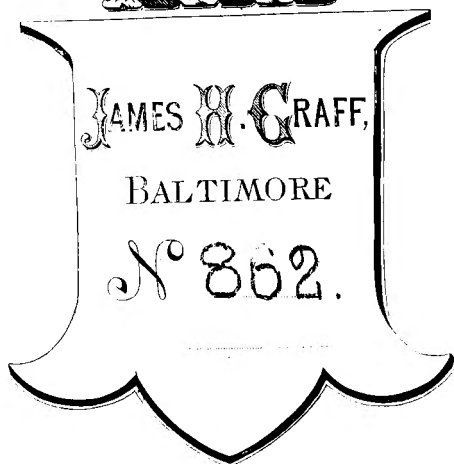


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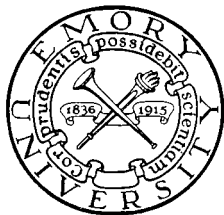


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TO
HER HUSBAND,

This Work

IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY
THE AUTHOR.

RESPECTABLE SINNERS.



CHAPTER I.

BRIDE AND WIDOW.

MISS LOUISA LAURA DANHAYE was a beautiful young creature, and motherless, when, in her seventeenth year, she made a Gretna Green marriage with Captain Ashton, of the ——tieth Foot.

Her father, Colonel Danhaye, of Danhaye Park, swore never to forgive her that imprudent journey. In vain did she, about once a quarter, for the first year or two, despatch to him the most touching epistles, wherein she assured him, in a variety of forms of expression, that she was very sorry for what she had done (which was luckily a fib), and entreated dearest papa to remit his blessing (she never asked him for anything but that cheap trifle) to his ever affectionate and dutiful child. The distinguished veteran, with that sublime implacability which so becomes an offended fellow-creature, constantly sent her back her letters in blank covers, and omitted to pay the post.

In four years Captain Ashton got his majority one February, and a pleurisy the following March, and expired in the arms of his wife.

They were then with the regiment at Cork. The poor gentleman, who had not a single near relation, except a brother in India, must have found it hard to die and leave his young wife and little daughter helpless in a rough world. But the major had a fine simple heart, full of love and trust. Dr. Batty, of the ——tieth, standing

by his bed, with a grave, decorous countenance, murmured the regulation phrase—"It was his duty to advise him to settle his affairs." The young man (he was but a young man of thirty-one or two) looked in the doctor's face, earnestly, yet somehow as if he did not see it, and his lips moved, while the tears came into his eyes. Then after that short silence, holding perhaps an age of pain and prayer, he said, gently, "Bring me my little daughter."

So little Helen, not three years old, was brought in the doctor's arms to her father's death-bed; and her round baby-face was put down to his dying lips, which kissed and blessed her.

Then the poor wife, who had borne the doctor's announcement with less than her husband's fortitude, and who had fallen swooning into her servant's arms, came tottering in from the next room, speechless, gazing wildly and piteously at the pale, awful face on the pillow.

She did not understand till afterwards what he said to her in those precious last moments of love and agony; yet she thought she was attending, for she hung on every word, and answered, "Yes, my Willy—my Willy"—and promised—she knew not what.

But she recollected it all afterwards, when her husband's friend, the good-natured Colonel of the ———tieth, came and offered his services, a few hours after she had muffled her face and thrilling ears, while they carried her husband away from her for ever, with the solemn Dead March wailing before him.

"Thank you," said she, to the Colonel, "you are very kind; I promised him to go to papa, in London. That is what I am to do."

"I am going to London myself on business," said the Colonel (who had, perhaps, no other there than that benevolent mission). "You must let me take care of you to your journey's end; you don't look as if you were fit or used to take care of yourself, my dear *ma'am*," he added, although he felt a quite fatherly kindness and pity for the poor tender young thing.

She seemed to have less even than her twenty-one years, notwithstanding that her pretty face was sadly blurred with crying, under that crimped muslin which covered up all her brown curls.

Major Ashton had thought that Colonel Danhaye would surely take back his poor girl to his heart when he saw her young face in that widow's cap, when she went to him so helplessly with her orphan baby in her hand. But Colonel Danhaye proved superior to the weakness unjustly imputed to him by his son-in-law. He declared that he "had said, once for all, he would never pardon his daughter for her marriage," and he prided himself on "meaning what he said."

So Mrs. Ashton crept into a little London lodging her friend the Colonel found for her, with her child and her servant; and sat her down and cried for the best part of two months. Few of all her old gay friends came near her, nor did those few repeat their visit of curiosity. Her wintry adversity benumbed that summer swarm.

She had been a petted child all her life till now. Up to the time when, without her father's leave, she had married a poor officer without any expectations or grand connections, the Colonel had encouraged her girlish vanity and wilfulness, which amused him. And then, having done his worst to spoil a naturally noble disposition, he proved inexorable to the rebellious spirit he had fostered by cruel indulgence.

When she forfeited the paternal favour, her Willy had thought no amount of petting on his part could be excessive, to atone for the wrong he had done her—that of asking and accepting the sacrifices she had made for his sake.

But perhaps while the widow is sitting all forlorn in her lodging, hope, that she cannot yet perceive, is dawning on the darkness of her solitary grief. She is going to have two surprises this June afternoon; and here comes her worthy maid, Elizabeth Tatt, to announce the first of them.

"Mrs. Nettlefold, ma'am," says Tatt, opening the door of the small sitting-room.

Mrs. Nettlefold is Colonel Danhaye's sister, and the wife of that well-off gentleman, John Nettlefold, Esquire, M.P.

She is a large, tall, personable lady, richly clothed; she advances rustling and majestic into the little drawing-room; she clasps the small and slender widow in her drab satin sleeves, and presses her to her handsome cameo brooch representing the ægis of Minerva.

Poor little widow Louisa is very much agitated. So full of sorrow, yet so glad and thankful to be kissed once more by anybody; so nervous, through loneliness and misery, that she quite clutches and clings childlike to her aunt, and sobs out her pent-up heart on the black lace mantle of that stately lady.

Mrs. Nettlefold pats her affably on the shoulder with a golden and tortoise-shell card-case, and exhorts her at short intervals—"Be composed, Louisa. This is weakness. Try to show more submission to the decrees of Providence. I imagined that my presence would comfort and cheer you—that you would take my visit in a right spirit."

"Oh, yes, Auntie! thank you, thank you! But oh, Auntie, my husband! Oh, Willy, my dear, my dear!"

"Think rather, Louisa," resumes Mrs. Nettlefold, in a solemn voice—"think rather of the shame and sorrow your disobedience inflicted on your poor papa and me. Be thankful and rejoice, my love, that a temporal punishment has so speedily overtaken you. The partner of your sin was cut off in mercy, instead of being made the instrument of your chastisement in his own person. Experience teaches us how few marriages contracted like yours, in sin and disobedience, end but in misery even here. Too easily tempted as you were, the unprincipled man who lured you from the path of duty would infallibly have shown, ere long, how he despised your weakness. The selfish are ever tyrannical," &c. &c. &c.

The pious lady continues to comfort and cheer her

afflicted niece in the like kind and judicious manner for several minutes. At an early period of her discourse, however, Mrs. Ashton withdrew herself from the protecting ægis of Minerva, and sat down at a little distance. Not sobbing or weeping any more, nor even in a drooping attitude, but with her delicate face uplifted, looking straight before her, its paleness flushing more and more on the cheeks, and quite aged by a bitter sternness about the mouth and brows.

Mrs. Nettlefold has also seated herself, and with her mild voice, spread of drab satin skirts, black lace draperies, and gently waving plumes, is really quite a delightful representative of the handsome, dignified, middle-aged, well-off British gentlewoman.

It is astonishing how the utterance of just and proper sentiments may irritate ill-regulated minds! Widow Louisa, starting up, bursts out all of a sudden in the following impatient and outrageous manner: "Aunt! I cannot bear it any more! I can much better bear to be left all alone in my need, as you and papa left me. Ah! do you think I will sit quietly and hear *him* abused? How dare you call my husband unprincipled, and selfish, and tyrannical? You—you are not worthy to speak of him—to utter his name. I was glad to see you, for I thought your heart was softened, and that you meant to be kind to me; but you are much crueller than when you stayed away. What have I done, after all? Papa was willing enough to marry me to Willy till his father died ruined. While Willy was prosperous, I might love and marry him, but I was to break my word and cast him off as soon as he was unfortunate. No, I could not, I did not, I kept my word to Willy in the only way papa left me. Perhaps I was wrong, but I never, never could repent my marriage; and I *was* wicked to tell papa I repented running away. I was happier in our humble home with my Willy—my kindest and dearest—than you, Aunt, in your fine houses, for ever quarrelling with your husband about money—the only thing you care for, I think. Aunt, you found me heart-

broken, would not that satisfy you and papa? Why have you made me feel wicked, and fierce, and mad?—you cruel, cruel woman!”

Mrs. Nettlefold's comely countenance has undergone a momentary change during her niece's indecorous outburst. That change took place, however, in the first instant of surprise, and has passed off like a summer squall, leaving the smooth expanse as beautifully serene as ever. Beautifully serene and benignly forgiving are the accents of this excellent lady when she again speaks. She can so easily pardon her dear Louisa's excitement: her dear niece is still so young, so new to tribulation: she writhes under the chastening rod: she cannot yet recognise the Finger in her dispensation. Time will clear away the mists of earthly passion, and set her (the good aunt) right in Louisa's eyes. She (the good aunt) can wait—prayerfully. Meanwhile, will her dear girl listen to her for a few moments? Not as to one having authority, or who presumed to dictate, not even as to a loving relative: she can wait—prayerfully—for that; but as to a mere stranger, only entitled to attention as having a greater experience in this evil world.

Poor widow Louisa is quite abashed and mastered. She sits down again, ashamed and sullen and uncomfortable, in front of this forgiving, well-behaved Christian lady, who is so superior to vulgar anger or human resentment; but Louisa does not love her aunt one bit better than she did five minutes ago—less, if possible. And she has not the least faith in that benign woman, but she sits still, and listens to her.

Mrs. Nettlefold then discovers the chief purpose of her ill-appreciated visit. It is to convince her niece of the inexpedience of remaining in her father's proximity. She declares that this proximity, of which he is well aware, is highly irritating to him, incensed as he (alas!) already is against her. That the best hope, under Providence, of ultimate reconciliation lies in her withdrawal at present to a distance. Let him hear of her as living in strict retirement (say in Wales), as becomes an un-

dutiful but penitent child. Let her no longer appear to defy him by continuing to reside in London, where he is liable to run against her at any corner, and where the family breach and *her circumstances* are, as it were, paraded in the sight and discussed in the gossip of their mutual acquaintances.

"In short," breaks in Mrs. Ashton, bitterly, "I am to go and bury myself like a dead man out of sight, that my father may hold up his grey head in society. That my utter need of home, and kindness, and money, may not be an open reproach to my father!—my father, who denies them all to his only child! I may go no matter where, on the earth, or under it, so that I don't shame this tender, sensitive father, and you, in the sight of men! But in the sight of God, Aunt—how in the sight of God?" cries the poor little widow, rather wildly.

It seems fortunate that just at this moment enters the nurse, Elizabeth Tatt, leading in "Miss Baby."

She is a sweet little daisy of a child: fresh, and white, and pink. She has a tiny round face, and large nut-brown eyes. Her nut-brown curls, newly-sleeked, hang down her back over her black frock, which sets off her dimpled white arms and shoulders. She is the prettiest little maid you could see in a thousand. Nurse is very proud of her, and always produces her to company with an air, as though she said *that* was a sight worth seeing, if you please, and she would trouble ladies and gentlemen to show anything like it!

Little Helen has a letter in her hand, and runs up to give it to her mamma. She is not shy or frightened at the unknown being in drab and waving plumes, any more than the island birds were at Robinson Crusoe, till they had heard his dreadful gun.

The grand great-aunt, benignly patting little Helen's sleek head, says, rather superfluously, and with a deep sigh,—"*This is your daughter, Louisa?*" and proceeds as if about benevolently to examine a charity-child in the Church Catechism.

"What is your name, Little One?"

"Helenmunkygoodammyashton," responds that small gentlewoman, promptly, all in one breath, and in the sweetest little coo imaginable, with a long sigh at the end.

"Oh! Miss Baby!" says nurse.

"She is named," begins the widow, half-smiling, "after her father's mother, and ——"

"Ma'am," interposes nurse, eagerly, "Miss Baby knows—Miss Baby can tell—if the lady would please to ask her."

Mrs. Nettlefold does not want to be told, and considers Miss Baby a nuisance; but those charming manners of hers constrain her to humour Elizabeth Tatt. So she blandly asks the child whom she is named after.

Whereupon little Miss Ashton, lifting dove-eyes to the unknown face, goes through her recitation with modest composure, nurse's forefinger describing commas in the air.

"Helen, afser poor papa's mamma; Munkygoo, afser poor papa's bluther; Dammy, afser wicked glanpa——"

"Oh, Miss Baby!"

Poor Elizabeth's comely florid face turns quite livid—is a face of horror, shame, and anguish. Conscience-stricken, she stands the most guilty and miserable of nurses. She feels there is no help, hope, or possible denial or mitigation. Miss Baby never spoke plainer. But, dear, dear! what an awful silence! Why do missis keep on sitting there, saying of nothing? If somebody would just speak, or something could happen—a earthquake or a chimblly a-fire would be a Providence!

It is the well-bred Mrs. Nettlefold who breaks that short silence which appeared so long to poor Tatt. She does not evince the least sign of having heard or understood that unhappy speech, and continues to interrogate the artless little traitor in the same benevolent manner. "And how old are you, Little Helen?"

"Flee mums," lisps Helen, who easily perceives that something is amiss, by nurse's face, and is consequently rather flurried in mind and speech.

On which Tatt rushes agitatedly into an explanation : " My young lady, if you please, ma'am, was three years of age the second of this very present month. Yes, ma'am, you'll excuse dear Miss Baby's mistake, and her little way of penouncing. Many ladies and gentlemen can't make out Miss Baby at first. You may quite mistake things she says till you're used to her little way, if you please, ma'am. Only yesterday she says the innocentest thing to Mrs. Pugster (which is the landlady of this house, if you please, ma'am), and she mistook, and was quite vexed with dear Miss Baby, till explained—yes, ma'am."

For here Mrs. Ashton says, almost sharply, " You can take Baby away, Elizabeth."

But at the same moment Mrs. Nettlefold rises, and, omitting to repeat the opening ceremony of a tender embrace, is content to enclose the widow's hand in both her own delicate kid gloves, murmuring (oddly but blandly), " For the present, God bless you, Louisa ! "

She pats Helen once more on the nut-brown head ; she even nods to nurse, and, always with that affable, indefatigable smile, rustles her affluent skirts out of the little room, followed by Tatt.

Then Louisa casts her eyes on the letter Helen put into her hand, and says to the child, breaking the seal, with tears in her eyes, " From dear papa's brother."

" I know," cries Miss Ashton, dishevelled all her sleek locks with a skip, " Unkymunkygoo ! "

The widow has not read much of her letter, when Tatt re-enters.

CHAPTER II.

DAILY BREAD AND DAILY CAKE.

THE letter had been to Cork, and the address, scratched out, was to Captain Ashton. It was redirected to his widow in the handwriting of her friend the Colonel.

These were the contents :—

“ Calcutta, February — 18 —

“ MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I have been obliged to obey the doctors, and take sick leave, and my passage to England in the *Lady Hubbleshaw*, which sails in about a fortnight. I have had a sharp attack, and can even now hardly hold my pen steady enough to scrawl this chit.

“ The voyage is to do wonders for me, however. My dear brother, about business we’ll talk when we meet, which, please God, will be very shortly after you get this word of warning. I must not repine at what, after all, will, I am confident, afford us both so much satisfaction, in bringing us together once more. As to the pecuniar, we must rub on as well as we can while I am in Europe. Give my love to your wife, and thank her for promising to teach your little missy my name. The *Lady Hubbleshaw* is a good sailor ; we shall not be many days after the *Jaulibad*, which takes this letter. I have little or nothing to keep me in London, and need not tell you I shall lose no time on the road to Cork. God bless us all, and send us a happy meeting.

“ Yours affectionately,

“ MONTAGUE ASHTON.

“ P.S.—Let me find a word at my agent’s, just to say, ‘ all’s well.’ ”

He was the major’s younger brother by two years and was in the Bengal civil service. Their father, a country gentleman, supposed to be worth three or four thousand a year, died suddenly, involved in debt so hopelessly, that the estate was sold to the last acre to satisfy his creditors. The late Mr. Ashton had gambled in certain magnificent speculations.

Thereupon Colonel Danhaye rescinded his consent to the marriage of the ruined heir and his only child ; that rash young couple contumaciously dispensed with his blessing and his money, and the young Bengal civilian had ever since remitted to them a large slice of his

allowances, from his standing in the service not yet very considerable.

For himself Captain Ashton would have declined this affectionate munificence, but he was weak where his pretty wife's comfort was in question. Bread he could give her, but she had been used all her life to cake; and he thought he had no right to refuse what would help to atone to her for the selfishness of his love. If it was deeply painful to accept his brother's sacrifice even for her sake, let him regard this as a fitting penalty to pay for the egotistic rapture with which he had accepted her sacrifices for him! This was sophistry, of course; Love's logic generally is.

Now Louisa, sincerely intending to sacrifice all for love, though in blissful ignorance of what that renunciation might amount to, had hardly, during her husband's lifetime, been permitted to feel that she had sacrificed anything at all. Captain Ashton, on his marriage, possessed a sum of ready money, the poor remains of his paternal estate, and the difference he received in exchanging from a cavalry regiment into the line. With this sum he had prudently intended to purchase his majority, and to insure his life for his wife's benefit; but had been unable to resist frittering it away by quick degrees, on the luxuries of which he could not bear to deprive his wife. He would at least make gradual and smooth for her the too sudden descent, from Danhaye Park and Mayfair, to the lower levels of the existence she had accepted at his hands.

So Louisa had from the first accepted at his hands commodious and expensive lodgings (poetically alluded to, you will remember, as her "humble home") in the garrison towns they inhabited; a maid, a saddle-horse, much millinery, and other elegant trifles, the component parts of that daily cake she continued to subsist on. At Captain Ashton's request she had left her father's roof without a sixpence, or a trinket, or any but the clothes she wore; his pride, true or false, was concerned in at least proving his love as little mercenary as her own.

The very day after their marriage his penniless heiress hopped up to him laughing, holding out a little foot in a ragged little silk slipper, and asked him for a pair of shoes.

Louisa held the precious metals in sublime contempt, and always called them "dross." So do a vast number of romantic young women whose parents happen to be well off.

And oh! ye younger brothers, it is always some dainty creature brought up on cake, that is so innocently eager to share your crust! Louisa, for instance, had an excellent appetite for her daily cake, liked it as rich as it could be made, and munched it gracefull—sighing sentimentally the while for dry bread. This disdain of pecuniary considerations she also expressed in song, trilling it through the pages of certain vocal music, beloved of youthful Britons, and greatly bought of Squeale and Co., those eminent music publishers in Bond Street.

Now, one evening, after a stern parent had torn them asunder, Miss Danhaye and her lover met (I grieve to say) at a mutual friend's house. On that occasion she carolled to her captive knight the following canzonet, to read it, an innocent, not to say imbecile, production. Yet then and there did those two young persons (neither of them a fool) tweedledee themselves into a state of misery and rapture, that *could* only result in a postchaise and four horses *ventre à terre* on the north road.

SONG—"THEY TEMPT ME FROM THY SIDE.

(*With a beautifully illustrated title-page.*)

Words and Music by K. I. BOSCHE, Esq.

Guitar accompaniment.

Con molta espressione.

They tempt me from Thy side,
They proffer gold and gems;
But ah, Thy chosen bride
Might trample diadems!

Guitar. *Waddity-waddity waddity.*

Might trample di-adems!

With Thee, the world were mine ;
 Without, all gain were loss ;
 One word, one look of Thine
 Outweighs their sordid dross.

Guitar. *Wuddity-uddity-uddity.*
 Outweighs their sor-did dross.

A morsel that we shared ;
 A cot among the trees ;
 Ah ! what were feasts compared,
 In loveless palaces ?

Guitar. *Wuddity-uddity-uddity.*
 In loveless pal-aces ?

Guitar. *Wuddity-uddity-uddity-twang dil.*

Mr. Bosche was the author of a great many other elegant amatory pieces, in which he married music to immortal verse, and which were greatly affected by the ardent youth of our drawing-rooms. Almost all these compositions breathed sentiments romantic to rashness, disinterested passion, and an utter contempt for expensive food. But Mr. Bosche himself married for money the unpleasantest old maid I ever saw, and always ate himself unwell when his patron, Alderman Squeale, procured him an invitation to the Mansion House, the only palace in which he ever had the chance of feasting.

But if Miss Danhaye, who sang Mr. Bosche's false sentiment with so much real fervour, knew no more about disinterested love than he did, at least she fancied that she knew, and that she meant what she sang. She was exceedingly in love with her Captain, who, besides that he looked a very fine fellow in his blazing coat, was really the best and truest of her numerous adorers. Her feminine instinct told her that much, happily for the poor child, for 'twas all the guide she took among the pitfalls.

So she turned up her lovely robin eyes to her warrior, hanging over her enamoured and warbled Bosche's doggerel with such innocent truth and trust, and with such a voice, and with such a face—that the young man's honest heart was half broken in the vain struggle he made against it and her. You know how it ended.

No sooner had his brother received tidings of this rash marriage than his generous contribution to the new *ménage* was not so much offered as simply announced to be regularly forthcoming henceforward, and almost as a matter of course. And so little did Louisa know or think about the real pecuniary part of her love-match, that she had never even understood the extent of Montague's generosity or personal sacrifice. "Willy had a dear good brother in India, who was much richer than they were, and helped them." Which only seemed to her as natural as it appeared unnatural in her rich papa to act in a contrary manner.

On her husband's death she had gratefully accepted the good-natured Colonel's assistance in arranging her affairs. But she herself had so vague a notion of their condition, and of her pecuniary resources, that he was obliged to form his judgment from the few positive facts he could collect. He knew that Mrs. Ashton had nothing to rely on from her father. He heard of "my good, kind brother-in-law in India, who always helped us;" and he found a cheque-book and a little money in the desk of which the weeping widow gave him the key.

He rather sorrowfully came to the conclusion that it would be imprudent to depend on any certain income beyond the minute pension awarded by our institutions to the widow and orphan of a Major in the line. He told her what her actual means were, asked her leave to dispose for her of such property as she had better realize, and advised her to dismiss her fine maid, and to dispense with all retainers except her little Helen's nurse, honest Elizabeth Tatt. He wrote a full report of his proceedings on her behalf, and of her present position, to Mr. Ashton, in India; and continued his good offices by conducting her to London; where, on the failure of her attempt on her father's heart, he saw her settled, in a respectable lodging, with as much comfort as the poor little woman's forlorn condition admitted of. And then, his *devoir* done to the distressed lady, our Colonel, with a manly tear of

compassion in his eye, kissed her hand, and returned to his post at Cork.

When Tatt came into the room again, she found Mrs. Ashton exclaiming and weeping over the letter she held. Nurse was heartily fond of her mistress, and unfeignedly believed her to be the finest and prettiest lady that walked, at present, till Miss Baby should be grown up. It was worthy Elizabeth who had sustained the poor fainting young lady, dropping pitiful tears on the white inanimate face, when the doctor, with regulation eyelids, and regulation murmur, had announced to her that her husband was on his death-bed. It was Elizabeth who unlocked the widowed arms from about that awful Nothing which they clasped there, and who carried her thence half-senseless, shivering, hugged, against her own warm bosom. Louisa could never forget it, no future prosperity, or troops of friends, could make her ever forget it; and at present nurse's sympathy and nurse's arms were still the poor girl's only comfort, and all the home she had. So she told her all her troubles as they came, and often cried on nurse's shoulder, and got hushing, and fondling, and petting, very much as her three-year-old Helen did, when she ran roaring to the same motherly arms, holding up a scratched finger.

Tatt's indignation against "missis's people," and especially against "missis's papa," overflowed all bounds of discretion; but she was certainly punished as severely as she deserved for this excess, by the innocent little tell-tale who had repeated her lesson so much too glibly to missis's aunt.

"Oh! nurse, nurse!" sobs the widow, "my brother-in-law is coming from India; and he—he doesn't know——"

"Never you mind, there's a dear ma'am!" cries Tatt, hurrying up to her zealously. "*I* wouldn't mind none of 'em."

Tatt has got into such a habit of being indignant at "missis's people," that she seems to have peppered her

whole stock of sympathy with resentment, and to be unable to offer it without that seasoning.

"I wouldn't mind none of 'em," she says contemptuously, holding a salts-bottle to the widow's nose. "Ingees, indeed! Better stop there, and slave-drive the pore black folk, and not come here a-worriting of bruised reeds. We've got enough prosecuting and slandering without he! Never you mind, a dear ma'am; you snuff of this, and lean agin my arm. Now, my patience, Miss Baby, my dear! don't you set off roaring when there's no occasion."

Great is honest Tatt's joy when she comes to understand that the expected brother-in-law is by no means to be regarded as one of the enemy; but, on the contrary, as the widow's one friend, good and true. His letter is shown to nurse, and she is pleased to read it aloud, in that thin falsetto commonly assumed by persons of her condition when they "read out."

But the falsetto quavers, and breaks into a sob, when she comes to the cheerful, brotherly hope of that reunion never to be accomplished here.

"Pore master!" says Tatt softly. Only to think—"

By-and-bye mistress and maid hold a council on the letter. Considering the delay occasioned by its travels to Cork and back, and the admirable sailing qualities of the *Lady Hubbleshaw*, it is evident that the communication which must meet Mr. Ashton at his agent's ought to be there as speedily as possible.

So the poor little woman, with many a bitter sigh, takes out that funereal stationery, the sight of which must send such a horrible chill to the heart of the returned exile. And presently Tatt goes and posts the letter, letting fly, as it were, that ominous raven to meet poor Montague Ashton with its fatal "never more!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MODEL BRITISH GENTLEWOMAN, AND THE
DAUGHTERS OF ENGLAND.

MRS. NETTLEFOLD quite passed from the thoughts of the widow and her servant in the contemplation of that important Indian letter. But I must not suffer her and hers to be spunged so readily from your recollection.

The Nettlefolds usually resided in their commodious family mansion in Portland Place, when they were not living at their handsome country seat, called Nettlefold Court. The family consisted of Mr. Nettlefold; of that model British gentlewoman, his wife; and of one daughter, at that time a young lady of nineteen, whose name was Georgiana. Miss Nettlefold had not the good fortune to resemble her accomplished mamma. Instead of being clever, she was undeniably foolish; and, instead of being handsome, suave, and smiling, she was plain and gauche, and quite grotesquely abrupt, peevish, and repellent.

The mother gave up her daughter as a hopeless subject when she was about sixteen years old. Mrs. Nettlefold then looked steadily at her, through no rose-coloured medium of parental partiality, but with all the stern discrimination of her philosophic mind. She roundly told herself that her only child was a great, awkward, fresh-coloured fool, without the least chance of "marrying well," and therefore totally unworthy of maternal consideration. It must be stated that Mr. Nettlefold's property was strictly entailed on male heirs, and, as his lady had not presented him with a son, seemed destined to devolve on a certain William Drewe, the eldest son of Mr. Nettlefold's only sister, who had married a poor clergyman.

Therefore, when the present possessor of Nettlefold Court should sleep with his father (I leave out an *s* advisedly), Georgiana could only claim a provision of

£3,000 from the estate, and the bereaved widow a moderate jointure.

No doubt there had been a time when even the strong-minded Mrs. Nettlefold had indulged sweet maternal dreams of social triumphs. Dreams wherein *her* daughter had haply out-danced, out-sung, out-captivated, and, above all, out-married all the daughters of all her particular friends. Nay, I can give you a touching proof of the natural force of her parental instinct.

At twelve years old, when Georgiana was a fine big red and white hoyden, she was thrown from her pony, and in the fall knocked out a front tooth. Hear what her exemplary mother had the presence of mind to do in this terrible emergency. She knew of a certain common child, of twelve years old, with pretty white teeth; and she said to herself, "One of those teeth will just do for Georgiana, and will save her from disfigurement." So the rich mother went to the poor mother of the common child and tempted her with ten shillings, to have one of those pretty white front teeth drawn out of her child's head. And times being hard, the thing was done, the two mothers looking on; and the tooth, still warm, scientifically transferred from the poor child's head to the rich child's head.

Now, I am not going to offer a single comment on this little anecdote. If it does not make you love and venerate Mrs. Nettlefold as a woman and a mother—how can I help it?

Mr. Nettlefold was a tall, thin, grey gentleman, having a lofty demeanour, ditto nose, an extremely stiff back, a slow, loud voice, and a very aggravating prolixity in conversation. In his early career he had been, of course, in the Guards, as became a rich British youth sacred to royalty, and retained of his military experience that stiff back, and the beginning of an anecdote of the Duke of Wellington, to the end whereof human endurance had not yet stretched. Mr. Nettlefold was often supposed to be of noble lineage, thanks to his nose, to his back, and to the distant affability of his manners. In the

social parlance of the snob, Mr. Nettlefold was very "high." But I understand that his father began to make a large fortune in a small shop; and that *his* father might have been a myth, if a son were not an authenticated fact.

Probably Mr. Nettlefold had done exactly the same amount of nothing in his generation as if the blood of all the Howards had slightly reddened that nose which was of the shape pronounced sacred to the aristocracy by ladies' maids, and fashionable novelists. At least this respectable gentleman possessed one of God's gifts which it would be difficult to prove sacred to the aristocracy, in a capacity however limited, for human affection. He doted on his one daughter, his fretful, plain, and foolish Georgiana. And for no reason that I am aware of, but that she *was* his daughter.

After all, poor Miss Nettlefold, originally fretful and foolish, had had small chance of growing up into a rational being. Her model mamma was much too conservative in her principles to depart one iota from the law, as at that time laid down and established, for the cultivation of the daughters of England.

It strikes me that the souls of the daughters of England are still at this present time but badly gardened, and that a noxious weed is industriously sown and watered there, which is apt to choke all simple indigenous flowers, as well as any that education may implant. The thoughts of our daughters are mostly led by any elaborately eloquent system of restraints, warnings, and cautions, to dwell on one thing: the accomplishments they learn make a silent but unmistakable reference to that, till it has become a monomania. So it comes to pass that thousands of our daughters are at their wits' end. It is almost impossible to be married in their own class without Money, and without Marriage life is an east wind to them.

They grow up under the most formal checks and restraints, and are therefore apt to yearn for an unreasonable freedom. Hence the modern monster called "Fast-young-lady."

Some of them sit quiet, smouldering silently, developing exaggerated sensibilities, outrageous imaginations, and heroic resolutions—which occasionally end in eloping with Signor Strilloni.

Depend upon it, my dear Miss Star, it is a great mistake to centre all your thoughts on Man, and to study, as you know in your heart you do, the means of conciliating, to the end of captivating, that fastidious brute. You are much handsomer, cleverer, and better than yonder hook-nosed, stupid, profligate Captain Blank, who spelt pleasure “plesure,” and promised to bring his “fladgilet,” in accepting your mamma’s invitation to her evening party; and to surprise whom into a proposal you and your mamma are exhausting the resources of your intellect in cunning little devices. And you will fail, after all that expense of virginal pride and matronly dignity; for he sees what you are both about as plainly as I do, and the abominable puppy laughs at you for your pains with all your mutual acquaintance.

Ah, be wise and firm, as you are pretty and clever! Let him alone, and cultivate the manifold sources of healthy enjoyment which have no reference to Captain Blank or any of his kind. Cannot you rejoice in the beauty, and freshness, and noble secrets of Nature, and love the hills, fields, and flowers, which “for their own sakes are dear?” Cannot you amuse and occupy your mind by entering with zest into originalities of character, and, noting keenly, yet tenderly, the humours of those about you—not only laugh but learn? Cannot you teach the orphan boy to read, and teach the orphan girl to sew? Above all, cannot you look on men of your own age except in the everlasting lover-light? Alas! how can we expect firmness and wisdom from our daughters, when the sincerity and purity from which these must spring cannot long survive in their unhealthy school of morals? And whole families of lovely blooming creatures must grow up, bud, blow, and drop off leaf by leaf, to leave but a green acid fruit, stuffed with choking disappointment—bitter old maids at thirty!

Perhaps the best hope for our daughters lies in their growing sense of humour. There is something healthy and vigorous in that love of laughter, *vice* giggle; and its first literary tokens among them were the decline and fall of the sentimental novel, and the popularity of Dickens and Thackeray. Instead of the sentimental, the cordial, comic, and true began to come into power. Honour to those great revolutionary Leaders! But, ah! the Ideal woman is the Lady of the middle ages; the creature to whom Dante might have addressed his

“Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare,
La mia donna,” &c.*

Such a lady is Desdemona, and Benedick's Beatrice. Where shall we find that type now? Is the race extinct? In our indecently decent days, could such frank, bland, modest, and single-hearted creatures grow up?

*

Widow Louisa's papa, Colonel Danhaye, is a handsome little gentleman of fifty-five. He has obstinate grey hair, much brushed up, a clean-shaven face, a brisk though faded hazel eye, and a good-natured immoral look. He sits at his late breakfast at midday, reading his *United Service Journal*, before he trots off to his United Service Club. Mrs. Nettlefold is announced. The Colonel considers his sister a very religious woman, and is always afraid of popping out something wicked in her virtuous presence. He has an immense respect for her solid sense, though he finds her heavy at times; and an unbounded faith in her piety, though he secretly thinks her inconveniently strict in her principles; and of course, being a short man, he prodigiously admires her majestic style of beauty.

“My dear Philip,” says the Model-gentlewoman of England, sweeping gracefully up to him, “I pay you an unseasonable visit.”

* “So beautiful and modest doth appear,
My lady, &c.”

"Not at all, not at all, Letitia. How d'you do? I ought to be ashamed that you catch me breakfasting at this time of day. Have a cup of tea?"

"Nothing, thank you." And then Mrs. Nettlefold adds, in a terrifying whisper, "I come to speak to you on a painful subject."

"L—G—!" ejaculates the alarmed Colonel, and immediately begins coughing, to divert his sister's attention from that slip of his careless old tongue.

"Philip, I have seen that misguided girl, whom indeed I hardly dare name to you."

"Little Louy!" cries the Colonel; and then stops short, the red coming into his face. After a moment's pause, however, he continues in a voice not quite like his usual one, though he tries to make it so. "And pray does Mrs. Ashton continue to—to defy me, and to—to glory in her disobedience and ingratitude?"

Louisa's father stares in his sister's well-regulated face with a curious contradictory expression in his own; frowning, yet somehow wistful. It might touch any one but her. But she meets it with stony eyes, and shakes her head slowly, with a windy suspiration of forced breath. Then she tells him, with affectedly reluctant pauses, rather more than all that poor Louisa, much enforced, had rashly flung at her the day before, in the exasperation of her sick heart. The excellent lady, with a freedom from egotism not uncommon in like cases, suppresses, for the most part, her own share in the dialogue—that is, reproduces the effect without the cause. And she winds up by relating, with an immense outlay of painful indignation, her fatal discovery of the manner in which Louisa's child is being reared to hate and vituperate her grandfather.

Colonel Danhaye is not red now, but very pale: he walks up and down the room, and says in a choked way, "Thank you, Letitia," when she has finished her story. She watches him with those hard eyes, and sighs out mellifluously, that she trusts he gives her credit for the best intentions, the purest motives, in visiting yonder

unhappy girl. She is not afraid to take good words in her mouth for her base uses. "Blessed are the peace-makers," she murmurs; "and I did so fondly hope to reach that young heart! So young, yet so hard! so callous to the touch of remorse, to the tenderest of fathers!—Alas!"

"Thankye, thankye, Letitia," says the Colonel, very calm and civil—and stops suddenly in the middle of the room, and swears a dreadful oath at his daughter—his motherless, widowed girl!

The pious lady excuses that burst of erring human passion; and going gently up to him, presses his hand in her sisterly fingers, and assures him of *her* unchanging love and sympathy in such a pitying voice—and glides away from him out of the room with such a pitiless face!

CHAPTER IV.

KIN AND KIND.

WHEN Mr. Ashton arrived in London two days afterwards, he instantly drove to his agent's, anxious to obtain that welcoming "all's well" which he had asked, to speed him on his way to his only brother.

Lightly let me touch on that terrible revulsion of feeling, the icy shock of which struck like a momentary death to his heart.

He locked himself into a room, not to yield unwitnessed to his anguish, but to wrestle with it till he could fairly, by God's help, master it. He sat down quietly, and all alone as he was, covered his grief-smitten face with his hands, in a movement of that mental decency which is an instinct. In less than an hour he walked composedly down stairs, and went to visit his brother's widow. When he saw the poor child in her weeds, he could not speak a word. He just drew her by both the

little hands she held out, as she came weeping up to him, and hugged her to his brotherly heart.

He remained with her the rest of the day ; and after dinner, taking little Helen on his knee, began to arrange future plans with Louisa as with a sister. He was a little surprised at her total ignorance of money-matters, and business of all kinds ; but this only seemed to strengthen the tie that bound them together. It might add to his difficulties and troubles about her, but at the same time infinitely increased the protecting tenderness of his interest in her. Ashton was certainly eccentric and rather crotchety—(his pet crotchet just now being phrenology). But generous and excellent beyond and above all crotchets, he was that rare creature, a pitiful-hearted philosopher. He walked between two good angels, Love and Justice, who informed all he did, said, and thought with the divine beauty of truth. He had certain opposite qualities, that might have made him either a misanthropic dreamer, or a hard ultra-realist ; but thanks to these two guardians, he preserved the golden mean. He might, with his remarkable power of moral clairvoyance, have come to anatomize his fellow-creatures in a cold-blooded way ; as it was, he could not see them by halves, or their evil without their good, as imperfectly-organized moralists do. There was no more charitable dealer with his kind under the sun.

When he left his brother's widow, and returned to his hotel that night, he considered her in his mind a good while, seated, chilly Anglo-Indian as he was, burning his boots at the bars of his June fire.

"Poor little soul !" said he to himself, at last, slowly pulling his coat off. "There's good stuff in her. She doesn't know the value of money, but she could soon learn, with that capital organ of Number. Plenty of pluck under that film of helpless fine-ladyism. Rather too much than too little Will, perhaps, but lots of real, good, hearty feeling, though she does talk boshy sentiment sometimes, like all your highly-educated young ladies.

Well, thank God, I am here! To think of that little thing, left all alone with that honest ass Tutt, or whatever her name is, and that bit of a child! The child's a trump. What a head!"

For her part, Mrs. Ashton had formed a still more favourable and decided opinion of her brother-in-law. But widow Louisa's opinions, like those of most women's on most subjects, were purely feelings. Now, it is incontrovertible that the feelings of most women, on most subjects, are extremely decided, and yet not absolutely unchangeable. Mrs. Louisa was, according to her acute brother-in-law, "intensely feminine." You were *ange ou démon* the first time she saw you. At present Ashton was *ange et archange*.

"Remember, Tatt," said the widow, next morning, "Mr. Ashton is going to dine here again to-day."

Mrs. Tatt was engaged in tying her mistress's little shoes, having dressed her from top to toe, as she did every morning, and then undressed her again every night.

I may here observe that the widow sincerely believed that she was dispensing at this time with all the luxuries of life, if not undergoing actual privations. She had given up her lady's-maid, without a murmur, at her friend the Colonel's first hint, and had not the least consciousness that she was still enjoying the use of one at the less accomplished hands of her zealous Tatt.

"Think about dinner, Tatt: take care it is what he would like. He is an invalid, you know. I am sure it is now almost my chief duty and only pleasure, next to what I owe my child, to devote myself to his comfort."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tatt, who was house-keeper as well as lady's-maid and nurse; "I went to the butcher's quite betimes. The beautifullest of weal, ma'am, and a charming leg-a-lam. I says to myself, weal's indigestive for a inwalid, so I embraced the leg, ma'am."

"Quite right," said the widow, who, I suppose, would hardly have known veal from lamb, uncooked, and who was thinking of something else.

"Mr. Ashton looks very pale and delicate, Tatt; he wants good nursing: we must take care of him. He deserves all I can do, I'm sure. He seems quite an angel of goodness sent to me in my sorrow."

"Yes, ma'am; he's a nice gentleman, and I hope he'll be a comfort. He looks it."

"He—he isn't much like—is he Tatt?" says the widow, in a low voice. "Though he is handsome too, in a different way, and has the same expression sometimes."

"He have got a look, ma'am; but he isn't such a comely, big gentleman, nor haven't his presence. Few has. Mr. Ashton is a smaller sort, and no way miling-tary. But he is a nice, neat-figured young gentleman, with a sweet eye, and a pleasant, kind way of speaking."

"I like Unkymonkygoo velly muts," cooes little Miss Ashton, who stands by listening with all her ears, and whose opinions also are feelings, just the same as if she were grown up. "I sink he is the doodest man in London. He has dot suts a nice smood white face, and I let him pince my head."

"Pinch your head, Miss Baby!" cries nurse; "pat of it, you mean."

"He didn't pat! he pined my head all over. He said I was a zolly little Tump. Mamma, mamma, what is zolly Tump?"

"Come to breakfast, chatterbox," says mamma, going quite smiling into the next room, as elegant and pretty and lovesome a young widow as ever was seen.

"Chattlebots! what is chattlebots, mamma?" inquires Helen, trotting after, to her bread and milk.

She is a young woman of an investigating turn of mind, and I think may justly consider herself aggrieved, like many of us, by receiving nothing but additional perplexity in a laudable pursuit of knowledge.

After dinner, future plans were fixed for three months to come. It was settled that they should all go to a certain quiet and pretty watering-place, and there at leisure determine more lasting arrangements.

Ashton saw that it would take time to initiate the poor little lady, his sister-in-law, in the sad mysteries of real economy. And he felt that she must be more accustomed to him as a brother before he could talk quite like one to her, either about her own scanty means, or, as a matter of course, of the pecuniary help he could give her, while in Europe on his own furlough allowance.

"How soon can you be ready, Louisa?" said he.

"Whenever you like," answered she; "to-morrow, I should think."

"Perhaps we had better consult Mrs. Tatt; may I ring for her?"

"Oh, nurse," cried her mistress, "we can go to Seabay to-morrow, I suppose?"

"My patience, ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Tatt, who commonly invoked that virtue as though it were her patron saint, and who resented the careless ease with which a domestic event of such magnitude was, as it were, tossed into her contemplations. "It's never possible."

"But now," put in Ashton, "what is there to prevent it, my dear Mrs. Tatt?"

"Sir, to-day's Toosdy."

"That's very true."

"And *being* of a Toosdy, sir, I can't possibly say earlier than Saturday."

"Now, *why*?" persisted Ashton, looking hard at her, but smiling.

"Sir," rejoined Mrs. Tatt, hard-pressed, but with earnest dignity, "there's many things as gentlemen don't take into their minds."

"That's true, too."

"And—well, sir" (desperately), "it's not fit to name to you, perhaps, but there's the things from the wash, and Miss Baby's bootikins."

"Bootikins! I'll buy her fifty pair in half-an-hour."

Mrs. Tatt could not forbear interrupting him. Miss Baby's bootikins is very pettiekler, sir. But I don't say we mightn't manage for once."

"That's right. And as for the clean petticoats, what's to prevent the dhoby—washerwoman, I mean, packing off a bundle as big as herself after us?"

"That *would* be a bundle, sir," smiled Tatt, primly, but giving way. "She is a very stout person, is poor Mrs. Vidler, and was cook in a clergyman's family, much respected till unfortunate through drink."

"What a pity!" said Ashton commiseratingly. "Then at three to-morrow afternoon, Mrs. Tatt. I'll go now, not to be in anybody's way. But I'll come to-morrow morning and help."

"Bedtime, Miss Baby," said nurse, patting Helen who had fallen asleep on her uncle's knee, with her cheek in his waistcoat. She half woke up, drowsy but not cross. She was a sweet-tempered baby, that's the truth.

"God bless you, little one!" says Ashton, kissing her very tenderly.

"Dod bess Unkymonky," murmurs Helen, sleepily, under the impression that she is saying her prayers.

CHAPTER V.

THE "TOXETER GAZETTE."

THE Ashtons hired a pretty cottage at Seabay for three months. At the time I write of, a good many years ago, Seabay was not at all fashionable, gay, or expensive. Then, the little town was humbly glad to see its visitors, to welcome its summer bathers and winter invalids, with its cheap salubrity, prettiness, and convenience. But some court doctor sent a court young lady, who had over-danced herself, to winter at Seabay instead of the south of France. Thenceforth Seabay was courtly, gave itself airs, sold its salubrity dear, and called itself, of course, the English Montpellier.

But when the Ashtons went there, it was still as

lovely, respectable, and dull a little town as could well be. A description of it would not enable you to distinguish Seabay from a score of other small watering-places. It had its Marine Parade, its two hotels, its assembly room, its reading room, its High Street and its Fore Street, its slow and obliging shopkeepers, who were all somehow related to one another, and, naturally, for ever at war among themselves.

It had its three or four thousand inhabitants, its four apothecaries, and five attorneys. It had its one chilly little church, and unnumbered irregular preaching shops. It had its horribly crowded churchyard, in which the dead were packed like herrings, hardly more, however, than the living inside the church, on Sundays.

There, in each painful pew, where four had room to sit uncomfortably enough, six miserable (but respectable) sinners paid for permission to double themselves up hebdomadally, and implore Heaven to illuminate all priests who let out God's house like a caravansary.

And Seabay had its Rector, a large, calm gentleman, who left undone that which he ought to have done all the week, and majestically acknowledged it in public on Sunday mornings.

And he had his proud young curate, bran-new and stiff from Oxford, with all the Oxford creases still in him; a pompous, self-delighted young prig, who solemnly fished and cricketed by day, and solemnly howled Bosche's melodies at tea-parties by night.

And Seabay had its terraces, its rows, its floral cottages, its Belle Vue, its Montpellier Lodge, its Chomondely House. The Ashtons rented Myrtle Cottage. It was really all that a myrtle cottage ought to be. It had its lawn, its verandah, and draughty French windows, its white walls half hidden in the liberal and fragrant overgrowth that gave its name.

The little family soon fell into a very restful and tranquil way of life. The household consisted only of Tatt, a Seabay maid, and the boy, who is sure to spring up in a small country establishment, and who is always hot,

and eating. Also there came on Saturdays a very meek old gardener, to rake the beds, and keep the lawn and myrtles clipped.

The cottage was nested on a dark red cliff above the sea, and Ashton was in the water every morning by seven o'clock. Shortly after that hour the widow, attended by Tatt, and accompanied by Miss Ashton, proceeded to the row of bathing machines which stood at the water's edge, in their accustomed summer quarters.

The widow and her suite liked to loiter, waiting their turn, on the shingles by the calm sea, in those lovely summer mornings. How racy was the biting freshness of the salt-water smell! How pleasant to look out over the silver-shining expanse, with its passing boats, and two or three anchored vessels;—to watch the creamy ripple that broke along the pebbles with so soft a sigh! How sweet the sigh, how cheerful the mingled sounds of passing oars, of voices calling over the water or near at hand! How gay the little crowd of bathers and bathing-women—those brisk, smiling, chattering, dripping Nereids in flannel bedgowns!

After breakfast, in the heat of the day, the widow sat on a sofa behind the green shutters of the open windows giving on the garden, and did her delicate needlework, and began her little daughter's education, with ivory letters on the carpet. It was one of Louisa's feminine characteristics to work beautifully.

Sometimes Ashton came in from the dining-room, his sanctum during the morning, and read aloud; or talked, in his curious suggestive way, on subjects which never entered into her consideration before. She liked the talk very much, odd and new as it was to her, and even when she did not altogether understand it. But, as her clairvoyant brother-in-law had discerned the first time he was in her company, widow Louisa had plenty of intellect (for a woman), which only wanted awakening to make her as intelligent and sympathising a (female) companion as ninety-nine intellectual men out of a hundred care to have. Ashton knew it amused and occupied

Louisa to listen to his queer speculations and fancies; and it was pleasant to him to sit in a cool, shady room, curled up in an easy chair, or sunk in it, with his head rather lower than his knees, dealing forth his vagaries to her willing ear.

He and his little niece becoming great cronies and play-fellows, they had many an expedition over the hills and far away, the young lady perched on a donkey, and her uncle at her bridle-rein.

Sometimes in the summer evenings they got into a boat and rowed about the silvery bay; sometimes explored the sweet-smelling lanes and meadows on shore, till the moonlight shimmered calm over shore and bay.

It was a state of soothing convalescence from that sharp pain and deadly sickness of heart which the poor young widow had so recently struggled through. And Ashton himself, broken in bodily health, and more sorely smitten than any one guessed by his only brother's death, felt how good for him was the gentle monotony of this secluded life, with a woman like a school-girl, and a little child, for his sole companions.

Seabay was not more taciturn than other watering-places, and naturally soon began to talk of the interesting little family in deep mourning at Myrtle Cottage. But I don't believe, for my part, that small towns are more ill-natured than big ones, any more than I can allow that small people are more vulgar than great people. I take this opportunity to announce my conviction that old maids are not more addicted to tittle-tattle than club-men; and I also maintain that five old maids at tea will not ventilate more spite, in a given time, than three young ones after a ball.

The Seabayites said no manner of harm, that I know, of Myrtle Cottage, though it certainly became the *pièce de résistance* of their conversational banquets. On the contrary, from the Rectory downwards, all had a good word for the beautiful and elegant young widow, the pale and interesting gentleman, her brother, and her pretty little girl. Her recent widowhood, and the absolute

seclusion she evidently sought at Seabay, were respected. No marauder for gossip made any pretext for invading the widow's myrtle fortress.

Ashton went to the reading-room every day to see the newspapers, and gradually made a slight acquaintance with two or three of the men whom he met there. But it began and ended within those doors, and amounted to little more than that discussion of political gossip which seems a useful British institution, to promote the circulation of sluggish British blood.

One July afternoon, Ashton was intent on a *Times*' leader, when an exclamation from some one caused him to look up. A gentleman had dropped a newspaper, and fallen back in his chair, as if fainting. He was a tall, lean man, about thirty-five years old, wearing an undress naval uniform, that looked as if he had worn it a long while. He had a mild face, thin, strong-featured, weather-beaten, and sun-burnt; hardly any whiskers, and fair brown hair. Ashton had seen him once before, knew his name was Hartley, and that he was the Preventive Service lieutenant, lately come to Mudditon, four or five miles further up the coast.

"Apoplexy!" cried a nervous little man in black, and darted at the sufferer's throat.

"Lord, bless me!" ejaculated Mr. Lipley, the large Rector, who had a very short neck, and immediately loosened his own cravat.

There were only four persons in the reading-room: Mr. Ashton, the Rector, the nervous little man, and the gentleman who was taken ill.

The little man's fingers had hardly pulled out one end of the patient's black silk handkerchief (which he did with a corresponding twitch of his own mouth on the same side), when Mr. Hartley opened a pair of hollow grey eyes.

"Sir," said the little man, winking and twitching his nose alternately, "you're very unwell. I must do something—get you something. Say a glass of wa——, dear me!"

The little man broke off, still holding the end of the black silk handkerchief, and in the act of winking. He was petrified by the intensely dismal stare with which the sick gentleman regarded him.

"Brandy and water, Tottle," said the Rector, impressively, from his elbow chair; "the gentleman is no more apoplectic than *I* am. He has been walking through the shower, and has got a chill. He is shivering. *Hot* brandy and water, Tottle."

"Where's the paper?" asked the sick man, abruptly, in a faint voice.

"This?" said Ashton, who gave him a glass of water he had fetched, and picked up the *Toxeter Gazette*.

"That," returned Mr. Hartley, seizing, and hastily thrusting it into his breast. He tried with trembling fingers to button his coat over it, and presently succeeded. Then he started to his feet suddenly, as if galvanized, and, staggering a little, walked to the door. By that time he seemed somewhat to recollect and recover himself; for he turned round, apologised in a low voice to the three gentlemen for having troubled them, thanked them, bowed to them, and, putting on his cap with its tarnished gold band, quitted the room. Ashton did the same almost immediately.

"No more apoplectic than *I* am," reiterated the Rector, in a comfortable voice. "It was a chill, you may depend."

"It was the *Toxeter Gazette*," quoth the little man, pulling his own nose quite malignantly; "perhaps somebody dead that he cared for—*everybody*, one would think, by the look of him. He seemed very shaky—now I think of it, I'll follow him!" And away he went.

"By-the-bye," cried the Rector, after him, "it was against the rules to take away that paper. I have not looked at it. You might mention it, Tottle, if you do overtake him."

But Mr. Hartley was not to be seen when Dr. Tottle came out of the glass doors of the reading-room. And the little man's attention was immediately diverted by

the opportunity that presented itself of catching a guilty Boy who had disappeared for three weeks past from the singing classes which Dr. Tottle patronized; and who now trudged past, recklessly whistling a popular air, with his head in a basket.

Meantime, the coast-guard Lieutenant walked on quickly, quite unconscious that Ashton, from the most purely benevolent motives, was keeping him in sight.

Ashton observed, as Dr. Tottle did, that the poor Lieutenant was still shaky; and thought him unfit to be left alone to take care of himself. He did not, however, carry his unseen guardian out of his own way; for, instead of turning off on the road to Mudditon, Mr. Hartley strode in the contrary direction, and was soon in the quiet up-hill lane that led past Myrtle Cottage.

When he got clear of the houses he slackened his pace, and then stopped altogether. He unbuttoned his coat, and put his hand irresolutely once or twice into his breast, as often drawing it back again. At last, his sunburnt face turning ashy pale, he pulled out the *Toxeter Gazette*, and, after pressing his fingers on his eyes, seemed to force himself to read a paragraph in it. But the effort was evidently in vain, for the next moment he thrust the paper back into his coat, and then flung up his hands with a frantic gesture and a bitter cry.

Ashton, who had followed as slowly as possible, was leaning on a gate under the hedge-row elms, at some little distance. While hesitating whether to advance or turn back, he was transfixed where he stood by a strange incident.

A gentleman dressed in black came riding towards them down the middle of the lane, at a brisk pace, probably accelerated by the cry of distress. But no sooner had the Lieutenant caught sight of this horseman, than he uttered a second cry, not piteous like the first, but rather a shout, and at one bound seized the horse's bridle. He pulled out the newspaper once more, and brandished it at the stranger, with a shaking hand: he seemed speechless with passion, his chest heaving with

sobs, his uplifted face ghastly, the tears pouring down it—his mouth convulsed.

The stranger appeared greatly taken aback, and extremely uncomfortable. He was a very gentlemanly neat personage, with a well-off flavour about him ; he was not at all in keeping with a scene of violent disorderly emotion ; he appeared to have nothing in common with that poverty-stricken Lieutenant, so threadbare and tarnished.

However, there he was ; and he looked as if he could not help it, or he certainly would.

At last he said something, and the first sound of his voice seemed to restore the power of articulation to that singular highwayman, who grasped his horse's bridle, and presented the *Toxeter Gazette* at him.

"Look here! look here!" he gasped; "you cruel devil! to let me see *that*! To keep me away to the last, and let me see *that*! Just by accident, *that*! You cruel devil! . . . And she's dead,—dead; and you told her lies to the last! You did, you did!—you always were a liar!—and she never knew it; and she's dead, believing you! Mother!" cried the Lieutenant in a high, thin voice, "do you see me now? Do you know it all now? I'm your poor son Robert. . .

I'd have crawled on my knees. Oh, mother! . . . O Lord God, have pity on me!"

And the coast-guard officer fell down on the road beside the fretting horse, and lay there like a dead man.

It all passed in a few minutes, and was unintelligible pantomime to Ashton, who was too far off to hear what was said. He now ran up hastily, and offered his assistance, which the stranger was in no condition to decline. He had dismounted, and slipped his horse's bridle over his arm; but the steed capered about, the man lay motionless; and, between the too lively horse and the too dead Lieutenant, this neat gentleman was deplorably embarrassed.

There seemed but one thing to be done, and Ashton immediately proposed it. The garden gate of Myrtle Cottage was but a little way further up the hill; its

brown thatched roof was visible above its little shrubbery. The patient must be carried into Myrtle Cottage forthwith. Ashton ran to the gate, and shouted to Dick, the boy. The boy shouted back, and came rushing out with a wild, hot face, and a carving knife, like a Murderer. The horse was consigned to his questionable care, and Ashton helping the neat gentleman, they lifted the Lieutenant, carried him through the garden gate, across the little lawn, and by an open window into Myrtle Cottage, where they laid him on the sofa. Widow Louisa beheld the dismal procession from her bedroom window.

Now this little fine lady proved herself, as Ashton had pronounced her, not at all silly, but endowed with pluck and good feeling. For she did not shriek, panic-stricken, as your spurious feminine creature would have done, at sight of the ghastly, dusty, inanimate body brought into her house; but, rationally concluding that some accident had happened near her gate, ran down stairs, as fast as her little feet could carry her, anxious to be of use, if possible—like the true woman she was. For, my dear ladies, who pique yourselves on being strictly feminine, do remember it is unwomanly to be unhelpful.

For a few moments the patient revived—but he had evidently received too severe a shock to be fit for anything but perfect repose, for a good many hours to come. He hardly recovered himself enough to comprehend where he was, or who surrounded him. He mechanically consented to climb slowly and dizzily up stairs, helped by Ashton and the banister, the stranger mounting after; and to go to bed in a darkened room, where he presently fell fast asleep. Thereupon, the neat gentleman touched Ashton on the arm, and whispered that he should be glad to say a few words to him below.

As soon as they were seated opposite to each other in the dining-room, the stranger opened his mouth—but shut it again; then coughed, cleared his throat, and finally, taking the *Toxeter Gazette* out of his pocket, presented it to Ashton. The paper was all crumpled

and soiled ; it had fallen out of the Lieutenant's lifeless hands into the dusty road, and the horse had set his hoof just on the place to which the neat gentleman pointed—making an apology for the dirt.

Ashton read :

“ On the 12th instant, aged 64, at Hartley Hall, in this county, the seat of her son, Grinston Hartley, Esq., deeply lamented and universally respected, Charlotte Joan, widow of the late Charles Hartley, Esq., and daughter and co-heiress of the late Sir Coney Grinston, Bart., of Coney Court, Coniscombe, also in this county.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK SHEEP.

“ MY Mother,” said Ashton's visitor, taking back the *Toxeter Gazette*, with a befitting sigh ; and added, “ My name is Grinston Hartley.”

Whereupon Ashton made a civil inclination of his head.

“ The patient upstairs, who has been thrust on your hospitality in so painful a manner, is my only (surviving) brother, Robert Hartley. I feel that no apology I could offer would be sufficient, for this extraordinary intrusion, to yourself and the lady I had the honour of seeing just now.”

“ My sister-in-law, Mrs. Ashton,” said Montague. “ I am her guest. But pray don't make any apology, or think it can be necessary.”

“ You are too good. Still, I feel as if I owed you some explanation of the strange circumstances under which you found us in the road.”

“ Not at all,” interposed Ashton, with his usual frankness and delicacy ; “ I come up just when Mr.

Robert Hartley is taken ill at our gate: we naturally bring him in here. What explanation can possibly be necessary?"

"You are too kind," said Mr. Hartley. But notwithstanding this courteous suppression of all curiosity respecting him and his, he observed, after a moment's silence, "I should prefer, if permitted, to tell you candidly the state of the case."

"It shall be exactly as you wish yourself," replied Ashton.

Of course he had not sat some minutes opposite to Mr. Hartley without perusing him phrenologically, and the result was not favourable.

He said to himself, "I don't like the look of him; he has no top to his head. He hasn't the least conscientiousness. I think he is a hypocrite; the more so for his poking his candour at me. To be sure, we are all hypocrites for that matter, only more or less. But it's a shocking head! I wonder if I shall find a redeeming organ or two, presently."

On his side Mr. Hartley had furtively examined Ashton, but not being acute, either by nature or science, had only discovered that he was certainly a well-conditioned gentleman, and probably clever, having a rather unpleasantly keen blue eye. Mr. Hartley himself, to a less keen eye, would merely have appeared a well-looking, fair-complexioned personage of seven or eight and thirty; having a prepossessing exterior on the whole, bilious perhaps, at a second glance, but still quite agreeable and irreproachable—not a speck on him.

"My departed mother," began he, paused, and shut his eyes; very much as if he had drawn down his blinds, and was to be supposed weeping behind them.

"My departed mother," resumed he, rather more briskly, pulling up his blinds, as if he had come back from the funeral, "consented to reside with me six years ago, when I became a widower, and to supply a mother's place to my infant son."

To which Ashton said "Ah!" and thought it sounded

like a bit of what affable critics call "this pleasing novel by a lady."

"My excellent mother," continued Mr. Hartley, "had long suffered grievously from the thoroughly perverse disposition of her youngest son;" and he waved his hand towards the ceiling, to indicate Mr. Robert Hartley, who was asleep in Ashton's bed somewhere in that direction. "Many years before she returned to take up her abode under my roof, she had been forced to silence the pleadings of her maternal heart in his favour. He had no mercy on himself, or the family he disgraced, and was one on whom mercy was wasted."

("Our fair authoress" again," said Ashton to himself; "what a namby-pamby, unnatural way of telling me his brother is a scamp!")

"Sir, this brother of mine has exhausted the patience of all belonging to him," said Mr. Hartley, beginning to speak much quicker, and as naturally as Ashton could desire. "As long as I can remember, he kept his family in hot water. He ran away from three schools before he was twelve years old. At twelve years old he ran away from home; his father advertised for him, and he was brought back, in rags, by a constable, who was handsomely rewarded. His father was a weak man, sir, and not all that a judicious mother could do availed to counteract his excessive indulgence. My departed mother was a most superior being—a strong-minded, admirable person; but her youngest son was utterly incapable of appreciating such a parent. At last, one day, when he was fifteen years of age, he replied to her calm remonstrances by a burst of appalling fury. . . . Sir, in this fit of diabolical rage he accused his mother of hating him, and Cursed her horrible to relate, he cursed his mother!"

("Why relate it?" thought Ashton.)

"He cursed her," repeated Mr. Hartley, as if he liked the taste of it in his mouth. "He is always cursing and swearing at somebody you heard him swear at Me to-day."

"I beg your pardon, I didn't," said Ashton.

"Well, sir, he did—and he cursed his own mother," reiterated Mr. Hartley, as if he could not bear to have done with it. "And then he crowned that awful sin by going and hanging himself!"

"Good heaven!" cried Ashton, astounded.

"He went and hanged himself in the lumber-room," said Mr. Hartley, with solemn indignation. "His father soon found him, and cut him down—crying over him. A very weak man was his father, sir. Then even *he* at length perceived that there was nothing to be done with his unworthy favourite but to send him to sea. We don't happen to have any naval interest or connection whatever; but if we *had*, it would have made no difference. Such as he are born to go to the dogs. His father made him a large allowance, a ridiculous allowance, which he always exceeded, and squandered on his follies and vices. But he ceased personally to molest us for a long period; until my father's death, indeed, which occurred about twelve years ago. On that occasion he came away, I fancy without leave, from the flag-ship at Plymouth, and forced himself in a maniacal state into my mother's chamber and presence—not even respecting that place and time. He insisted on attending the funeral, in a state of indecent agitation that made the ceremony like an Irish wake, sir! and brought the tongues of half the county upon us. Since that time we have seen nothing of him. But we knew he had sunk lower and lower, formed connections I will not sully my lips by particularising. And, in short," concluded Mr. Hartley, with a burst of natural feeling, "he is a reprobate, who seems to have existed only to be the bane and torment of a highly respected family!"

"Then you would not wish to go upstairs and see how he is now?" asked Ashton.

"Certainly not: our meeting to-day was a most unfortunate accident. I was obliged to come into Seabay, to meet my man of business. My family seat is about eighteen miles off, on this side of the town, and I could not anticipate the ill luck of meeting my brother (who

ought to be at Mudditon), rambling up a lane in the opposite direction, at the very moment I ride down it! It seems a fatality; though I might have foreseen, too, that where his duty does *not* lie, there he would probably be found."

"The shock of suddenly learning his mother's death appears to have caused his illness," said Ashton. "He first became unwell in the reading-room, where he saw it in the *Toxeter Gazette*."

"Very likely, very likely," replied his brother; "he has never had the least self-control or moral dignity."

"Then you did not inform him of his mother's death?" said Ashton.

"Sir! did I insult my departed mother before she was cold in her grave!" cried Mr. Hartley, animated by a holy rage; "can you ask?"

"I beg your pardon," answered Ashton,— "I needed not, certainly."

"On the contrary, I took care to suppress the announcement in the papers, till the ceremony should be safely over before it appeared. And I have now issued orders to my servants to deny him admittance to my house, should he present himself on any pretext, if they wish to keep their own places there. And henceforth," cried Mr. Hartley, who had by this time got, it must be confessed, as ill a look into his countenance as a well-behaved gentleman can possibly exhibit, "henceforth Mr. Robert Hartley is less than a stranger in my estimation. Five or six times, in the course of our lives, has he entreated my pardon for the grossest insults, the most abominable calumnies, the most intolerable outrages—and each time, as a Christian, I have extended my forgiveness. But now—I beg your pardon, did you speak?"

"*Until seventy times seven*," Ashton was murmuring involuntarily; however, he shook his head, and Mr. Hartley, whose holy rage did not quicken his perceptions, went on.

"But now, sir, I have done with him! As a sacred

duty to my departed mother, I take you to witness that I renounce my unworthy brother."

"Will you come into the next room?" said Ashton, who had studied Mr. Ashton quite as long as he comfortably could, and without the consolation of discovering the redeeming organs of which he had been in search.

Mr. Hartley immediately rose, cast a glance into the glass over the chimney piece, adjusted his cravat, and accompanied Ashton calmly into the widow's presence.

There, he was blandly complimentary, though with an affecting gravity in honour of his new mourning; gratefully consented to take a glass of wine; insinuatingly found out all he was curious to know about his hosts; and ventured to hope they should meet again under happier auspices.

His poor old family seat was not a hundred miles off—would they some day do him the honour to visit its verdant shades?

Louisa thought him a remarkably amiable, slightly prosy person, and his frequent reference to his departed mother touched her very much. He was evidently of a most affectionate disposition. So she offered him her little hand, and quite pressed his chill fingers when he was bowing himself off, and assured him he might rely on her taking good care of his poor brother, and entreated him not to harass himself on the subject.

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKFAST AT MYRTLE COTTAGE.

THE kind-hearted folks at Myrtle Cottage visited their sick guest several times in the course of the evening. Always finding him fast asleep, they took care not to interfere with tired nature's sweet restorer; but at last, placing a night-light, and something to eat and drink, in

the room, in case he should awake, they left him to his repose, and went to bed themselves.

Ashton got up early as usual next morning; and before he went to bathe knocked softly at the door of his own proper bedroom, in which he had installed the sick stranger.

The knock was immediately acknowledged by a "come in," and he entered. The Lieutenant had not been fairly awake more than ten minutes; just long enough to struggle out of his perplexity about where he was, and how he had got there. He remembered pretty distinctly that he had lost his senses in the lane, and had recovered them in the Cottage; also being brought up there and put to bed by some good Samaritan, whose face he knew again as soon as he saw Ashton's.

But he was not in strong health, and felt shy, and very wretched, as thoughts of his brother, the fatal *Toxeter Gazette*, and many cruel griefs, errors, and wrongs, pressed back on his weakened mind. He raised himself up, and his careworn face turned very red, as he stammered something about being "grateful," and "ashamed." Ashton came and shook hands with him, hoping he was better, and had wanted nothing.

"I—I am quite ashamed," said the poor Lieutenant again, in a trembling voice; "you see I hadn't been well for a good while, and I couldn't stand much, and I had been up on duty for three nights running. But I'm quite well—quite well now, thank you; and I'll—I'll get up, I think."

And he cast a look about the room for his clothes, which were not visible; nothing but his little old silver watch, which somebody had wound up for him overnight, and which ticked familiarly on the dressing-table.

"I'll send up the boy with your clothes," said Ashton, "if you really prefer getting up; but you look invalid enough to stay in bed and be nursed. My sister-in-law and her right-hand woman will be disappointed of their prey, if you refuse to be slopped and petted awhile."

"It is a great deal too much kindness—I really don't

deserve it," said Robert Hartley; and nervously put out his hand and took Ashton's, his wan grey eyes glistening; "but I think I would rather get up. I ought to be at Mudditon."

"I'll send you your things directly," said Ashton, "and hot water; and there's the bell, and rummage the drawers for anything you want. You're sure you can dress without help? Well, I shall find you downstairs when I come back from my swim, I daresay."

With the Lieutenant's hot water and well-brushed uniform, came an invigorating cup of coffee with an egg in it; and when Ashton returned, Mr. Hartley was pacing the verandah before the open windows. His step had very little of the quarter-deck roll in it, and he looked out straight before him, with weary and wistful eyes. But he had picked a clove-pink, and every now and then put it to his nose with a faint look of momentary pleasure. Ashton joined him, and they walked about the garden, till the widow and her suite should appear.

On this beautiful blue summer morning the long shadows of trees and shrubs lay motionless across the sunshine of the trim little lawn, and the dewy flowerbeds looked like fresh nosegays. It was one of those green and flowery spaces, those delicious tiny pictures, which Nature, the absolute artist, only paints for us in England. Common enough there, more common than the ordered gardens great, which can be created by money in all lands. But these jewelled nooks, these precious little caskets, these proper English treasuries, lie hidden innumerable, under summer leaves, by English roadsides only. And the latch of the garden-gate, that swings open so easily, protects the sacredness of home better than my Lord's porter, behind the grand wrought-iron doors of the Show-place.

This particular little garden extended on one side to the verge of the cliff, and a gravel path ran along it, fenced by shrubs and a paling. From this path there was a cheerful, charming view eastward, of the sea; the long reach of shingles; the beach-walk or parade of the little

town, gay with coloured moving specks ; and the opposite range of those lofty, dark-red cliffs which, headland after headland, designed the crescent of the bay.

Beyond the farthest of these capes, a soft blue stain on the horizon marked that extreme point of the coast which was visible only in the rare clearness of some day like this.

As the two gentlemen were contemplating this pleasant scene, Ashton said, with a smile, "By the way, I have still to introduce myself to you ; for though we have met once or twice in the reading-room yonder, I don't suppose you know my name is Ashton—Montague Ashton."

"And mine is Robert Hartley," said the Lieutenant, who had been walking by his side very silently, smelling his clove-pink, and added : "But I daresay my brother told you so yesterday ?"

"He did."

Now seemed to have come Mr. Robert Hartley's turn to favour Ashton with a little candid brotherliness ; but he did not take it, continuing to walk on silently, smelling his pink.

Ashton was not surprised ; perhaps because he had been hard at work on the new head that morning, before its owner, by putting on the cap with the tarnished band, had unconsciously interfered with the researches of science.

But you need not have understood anything of bumpology to discover very speedily that Robert Hartley, the reprobated, and Grinston Hartley, the respected, were black and white—London and Melbourne !

So that the course of conduct which would occur to Grinston as the natural one to pursue, would in all probability never suggest itself to Robert at all, and *vice versâ*. At any rate, it is certain that the Lieutenant did not take this opportunity to challenge Mr. Ashton's sympathy, respecting his family differences, by any allusion to his departed mother, or by "candidly" abusing his only brother.

Perhaps, because he had nothing to allege against so

respectable a person ; but I am, I confess, led to the conclusion that Nature had given the soul of a gentleman to the one, and denied it to the other. "Which was which" must ever remain a matter of opinion.

Presently the widow appeared, fresh and charming, at the open window of the dining-room, and little Helen trotted out of it to call her uncle and the guest in to breakfast.

Louisa took the Lieutenant kindly by the hand ; said she was very glad to see him, if he had not left his bed when he should have remained there patiently ; and they all sat down to breakfast. And the widow's tea was always very good ; probably because Tatt made it, and her mistress only poured it out. A little talk on indifferent matters took place during the repast. The Lieutenant did not say much ; but when he was addressed, or when he did speak a few words, his face took a gentle and sweet expression, that atoned for its ruggedness. You could see the man's heart look from his face, and how simple and good it was—full, even now, of childlike wants and yearnings, benevolent, affectionate, and half broken.

"You are fond of flowers ?" said the widow to him, observing the clove-pink by his plate.

"Yes—very," rejoined he, brightening.

Had he a garden at Mudditon ? No—at least nothing but a bit about as big as a pocket-handkerchief. But he had got a few flowers in it, and one very fine clump of heart's-ease, the Black Prince—of course she knew it—really black, with a spark like fire in the middle. He had seen a humming-bird's head like it in the West Indies.

There was something touching in the poor gentleman's artless eagerness about his flower ; and he presently added, with much animation and simplicity :

"How pretty and pleasant it is here, to be sure ! Nothing so pleasant as to sit at breakfast in summer, in a ground-floor room, with windows opening on a flower-garden, like this. That was always my fancy when I used to build cottages in the air."

"Well," said Mrs. Ashton, "I hope you will sometimes come and enjoy your fancy here, Mr. Hartley, and not treat it like a cottage in the air; and my brother and I shall enjoy it with you. And I hope you will bring me just one of those precious Black Princes as soon as you can, or I shall be obliged to go to your flower-bed and steal it."

So far from appearing gratified at this kind invitation and proposition from the lovely widow, Mr. Robert Hartley's countenance fell, becoming as dismal as ever, and he made a very confused reply. They could not persuade him to stop more than an hour or two after breakfast. He insisted on walking to Mudditon, and that to do so under the July sun would benefit his health. However Ashton declared that, if he must go so soon, he himself should much like a long, hot trudge also, and the pleasure of Mr. Hartley's company, if his own were not disagreeable. He had never been to Mudditon, and had heard it was a curiously situated place.

To which the Lieutenant replied, in a troubled voice, that Mr. Ashton was very good, and that the weather was very hot, and that Mudditon was very ugly. But Ashton, really desirous to see him safe home, would not be rebuffed.

So the widow bade him farewell very cordially; and Helen trotted in from the garden with a great nosegay, which she had commanded Dick, the boy, to cut for her, and which the little lady coquettishly presented to her uncle, stating in a whisper that it was for the sick jempselman.

CHAPTER VIII.

TALK BY THE WAY.

It *was* a hot walk to Mudditon, that July morning.

But for some time the highway had an edge of cool-

ness under thick-leaved and low-feathering branches, whose shadows lay black, like iron arabesques, on the white glare of the road. But this, its hedgerows ending, still led inexorably up a high eastern hill, steep and bare of shade. And the top of the hill was a wide common, windless and shadowless, that seemed to shudder under the cruel eye of noon. But breezeless as it was, the air at that height was cooler, the smell of the trodden turf was gratefully aromatic, and as the wayfarers turned about, westward, the beautiful view seemed to refresh them through their sense of sight.

Below, the deep and narrow valley of Seabay, in a dazzle of noonshine, basked at the bottom of its green half-circle of hills. The little town drowsed and blinked in the sun by the sea, its grey church tower stood up and watched in the midst. Cottages and villas innumerable twinkled among the woodlands on the parky slopes. Here and there, some zig-zag of the tiny river quivered lance-like between meadow trees.

The bay, calm as the arch it reflected, was traversed by pale silvery pathlike streaks. Along the sands the retreating tide languidly rippled diamonds against the sun. A collier at anchor in the bay "sat double, *ship* and shadow," a line of black boats plying between itself and the beach. Some small craft crept across the middle distance, or lay there motionless. Faint phantasmal sails haunted the dreamy horizon. Past a straight reach of glaring shingle, the tall red cliffs reared themselves more grandly from their own deep and awful shadow in the sea, their precipices featured by broad masses of light and dark. These fell abruptly to a long low cape; and above it, the softly-fading line of furthest azure coast (a lakelike slip between) was visible from this opposing height.

Ashton descried a little tree that grew on the edge of the furze scrub, and under its shadow stuck in the ground the spike of the huge sketching umbrella with which he was prudently armed. Here he stretched himself out at full length, sheltering his head under that scanty

tent; and the Lieutenant followed his example, carefully depositing little Helen's nosegay beside him.

There had been some fragmentary conversation between them during their walk, but Ashton saw that his companion's mind was very much pre-occupied by painful thoughts, and naturally referred their melancholy absorption to his mother's death.

Now the portrait of that deceased matron, even sketched by the partial hand of her admiring son Grinston, had appeared to Ashton singularly unengaging—that is, positively repulsive. He respected all the more the filial genius of her son Robert, which could warm that cold image of maternity with its own life, and, as it were, extract rays of loveliness like sunbeams from that parental Cucumber. He did not worry his companion with attempts at indifferent conversation, but lay silently basking on his back, with his arms over his head, and presently had floated into his beloved cloud-world of fantastic theories.

He was roused by the Lieutenant's voice. Mr. Hartley was sitting close to him in a lump, clasping his hands round his knees, and was saying, in his nervous way, that he had appeared very ungrateful to Mrs. Ashton, who had been so kind to him. She could not guess what he felt when she asked him to visit them often, and talked of going to see him, and interested herself in his flowers, and was so—so excessively good. He could not speak a word—but he ought—taking him in as they had done, and showing him such extraordinary kindness. Yes, he felt he ought to tell Mr. Ashton——

But here Ashton, who had raised himself up on his elbow, and saw the expression of a painful struggle on his face, interrupted him.

“Pray, don't speak in this way, my dear Mr. Hartley,” said he; “no one with a spark of feeling themselves could impute to you any want of sensibility. Do believe that my sister was thankful to be of the least use to you, in the accident that brought us together. And we both wish to offer you our sincere sympathy in

your affliction, if you will accept it on so short an acquaintance."

"But you don't know," said the Lieutenant, in a broken voice, and with his face in his hands—"I—I think you can't know how little I deserve it!"

And after a pause, always covering his face, he continued in a rush of passionate feeling, that was evidently part of his nature, though habitually smothered:

"I have been wrong all my life, and a miserable dog most of it. I deserve all my misery, Mr. Ashton, for I committed great crimes in my youth. What good is it that I repented directly and ever since? None; I know it is useless; there's no pardon for some sin. That was what she—what all of them but my father said; and my poor father was too tender to me always, I know. My poor father, my dear father! But it's all true. I committed one awful sin, and went and crowned it by another. It can't be got over or sponged out. It's a dreadful fact that has crushed me—as it ought; yet I can't always submit to the consequences. I deserved, as they said, to be an outcast from home, treated as a pariah, and to forfeit family affection. I know that—yet I can't always submit. Yesterday only, how I broke out against my brother! I had no right—no right! I should claim nothing from him or anyone. But it seemed so hard—it was so horrible for me to see *that* first in a newspaper, like any stranger. To know she was gone, gone without forgiving me, and no hope, not a ray left for me now. My punishment seems greater than I can bear!"

His voice broke into a convulsive sob.

"My dear Mr. Hartley," said Ashton, much affected, to the poor agitated Lieutenant, "let me say this is a morbid state of mind in you, induced by bodily weakness and a recent severe shock."

The Lieutenant took his hands from his haggard face, with the tears rolling down it, and said in a hoarse whisper—

"*'Cursed be he that curseth his father or his mother!'*"

I cursed my mother when I was fifteen years old; and she is dead, and she never told me she forgave me."

"Wicked old hag!" was Ashton's unspoken comment. But he said kindly, "I won't enter now on theological questions, or try to persuade you that you are not taking a Christian view of the case. But I must express my opinion, that if any one has caused your sensitive mind to apply this particular verse out of the Old Testament to your own circumstances, it cannot have been a Christian. Any one doing this, for any purpose, has been guilty of the most hellish cruelty; guilty of a crime a million times blacker than yours, I feel convinced, in the sight of our pitiful Creator."

The Lieutenant, listening wistfully, shook his head. "Facts are stubborn things," said he.

Ashton went on with irrepressible indignation, speaking rather to himself than his companion:

"A boy! almost a child! a boy of fifteen, hardly cognizant of the meaning of what he uttered! A boy evidently passionately affectionate by nature, starved and mad with hunger for affection, which was a necessity of his moral existence—stung to frenzy by the lack of it! That the frantic expression of this child should have been made an instrument of torture, a ton-weight to crush him, a scourge to fetch blood, through all the best years of his life! and by his own mother—why, it passes all the tales of Jesuitical cruelty ever dinned into our Protestant ears!"

Ashton checked himself forcibly. He, in his turn, remembered another, holier text, which says, "Blessed are the peace-makers!" He must add no fuel to family heartburnings.

"That is how I view the matter," added he, presently, in a quieter tone; "of course, according to my own particular organization, my temperament and turn of thought. But I was wrong to express myself so strongly. I propose we walk on."

As they proceeded across the hill-top, Ashton said, pursuing some train of thought aloud, "It strikes me

that a lot of mischievous fallacies have got into our flock of tame sayings—ill-weeds among our pot-herbs. For instance, ‘Facts are stubborn things.’ People often quarrel, and fight, and murder one another, just because facts are supposed to be inevitably ‘stubborn’ things. Sometimes they are, but not necessarily. A great many facts are as plastic as putty. All a fact *must* be, is positive, actual, not to be anyhow got rid of. But the first thing each man does with a fact is to stow it in his cranium, where, if it’s a putty fact, it takes the shape of the cavities, which are not exactly alike in any two skulls.”

“Well,” said the Lieutenant, smiling a little, “I accuse a fellow in a crowd of filching my purse, and it’s found up his sleeve. Shouldn’t you call that a stubborn fact?”

“It’s a fact—it’s not stubborn.”

“No?” said the Lieutenant, incredulous.

“Don’t you see?” quoth Ashton, earnestly, with a peculiar nervous depression of one eyebrow habitual to him; “it takes divers shapes. To you it’s a legal proof of crime. To the pickpocket, it’s a misfortune. But I’m a zealous preacher, who has witnessed the transaction. *My* purse is all right in my trousers’ pocket. I seize the fact; I make an inverted tub of it. I mount upon it, and exhort you to love the thief dearly, to resign your purse to him, and to entreat his acceptance of your watch also. It’s the old chameleon fable: the fact is the chameleon. A’s got a green mind, and the fact looks green in it: B’s got a black mind, and the fact appears as black as a coal there. Don’t you see?”

By this time they had got across the common, and were descending the other side of the hill by a stony lane, into a dell-like hollow with a tiny village in it. Not Mudditon, which was two hills farther off, and on the beach; while this was a little rural colony, nestled among orchards high above the sea.

But the hottest and heaviest of their toil was over. Beyond Dipdon nothing but bowery green lanes winding

softly up and down; then a sudden turn to the right, and presently an abrupt descent between hewn rocks into Mudditon.

They had been silent again for some time, but now the Lieutenant stopped short and said, unexpectedly, "Mr. Ashton—I ought to have told you—I ought to have told your kind sister—I'm a married man."

Ashton was surprised, because it had never happened to occur to him that the Lieutenant might have a wife; but he was chiefly struck by the singular shyness that seemed to have made a difficulty of the announcement.

"I'm very glad to hear it," said he, smiling; "with an Englishman marriage often means a great deal that's happy and comfortable. I consider the Wife a purely English institution. I hope you'll do me the honour to introduce me to Mrs. Robert Hartley—not to-day perhaps, but some other; I'll come another time."

"No, no!" cried Hartley, "I would much rather—I beg your pardon, pray come now."

And he marched down the cut with great strides, that left Ashton nothing to do but to run after him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LIEUTENANT'S CORNER HOUSE.

ONE could not easily find a drearier fishing village than Mudditon. Amidst perhaps the richest natural scenery in the island, it sprawled there in mud and exasperating shingle, at the bottom of its horse-shoe of red cliffs, without a charm but that which sea and sky could give it. Yet who shall say that this is nought?

"Come down here!" Nature might chaunt to her protesting lover; "it is easy to sit at my feet yonder, *sub tegmine fagi*, among the pleasant hollows or the thymy slopes. Come dwell with me and be my love, at Mudditon! Here will I not trick myself in my bravery, like

a bride at her feast: here shalt thou see nought under the sky but a waste of water, smooth or stormy, and the shadows of the hours of the daylight as they move round the semi-circling rocks. Here, if thou canst find me fair, thy love is true. And this shall be thy test."

Hartley and Ashton went right through the sweltering and evil-odoured village, with its swarms of squalid women and children; and came out on the broad sea-marge of rough shingle, covered with boats and nets, and smelling of pitch, stale fish, and dead seaweed.

The stone station-house was built a few yards above high-water mark, and distinguished by the tall flagstaff alongside it. Our coastguard Lieutenant, however, turned his back on this object, and nodded towards a little white house to the west of it, saying, "I live *there*."

It was the last (seaward) of a row of little one-storied white houses. There was something queer in its shape, which caused it to look niched into the rest like a corner cupboard. The part that appeared to be the front had a single window above, and a glass door, all on one side, below. The window had a green shade over it, like a weak eye.

Before this unimposing façade Ashton recognized that garden-plot, "the size of a pocket-handkerchief," in which the Black Princes deigned to sun their royalty, and which was so full of all kinds of common flowers that it looked like a kaleidoscope pattern. This palette-like space of colour was enclosed by a low paling, painted green, with a wicket gate, and narrow path close to the house, as if in order that the few feet of pebble path should trench on the flower space as little as possible.

The glass door opened inward, right against the steep stairs, although on the other side there was only a blank wall. And right in front, just the width of the staircase from your nose, yawned the kitchen portal; so that when the glass door was opened you could only get upstairs by shutting it again, which you accomplished by going half-way into the kitchen to do it.

While that door was open, all communication was cut off between the lower world and the inhabitants of the chamber with the weak eye. Objections might be made to this style of domestic architecture, but, after all, they were not insuperable.

Hartley and Ashton opened the glass door, advanced upon the kitchen, wheeled round, shut the door, and climbed upstairs.

They came into a pretty little cool parlour enough, pleasantly darkened by the projecting shade. It was humbly furnished, but arranged with that nicety and order so dear to a seaman. There were hanging shelves of books, coloured drawings of ships, and a sketch of a Family Seat, on the walls; pots of flowers on the window-sill. On a round table, with its clean faded cover, stood a glass of fresh-cut flowers, beside the Lieutenant's old brass-clamped desk. Ashton was struck by a splendid tiger-skin which lay on the little horsehair sofa, and was examining it when Hartley, who had gone downstairs again, came into the room accompanied by a very handsome young woman. To her he said on entering, "Mr. Ashton, Ellen;" and added with great distinctness to Ashton, taking her hand, "My wife."

His manner was as gentle but much less shy than usual, as an honest shy man often is when fulfilling some serious duty.

Mrs. Robert Hartley struck Ashton as the handsomest woman he had ever seen. Rather tall, and extremely well shaped, with round white arms, and small wrists, fully displayed by the rolled back sleeves of her dark cotton gown. Her skin was fine and fair, her face rather a long oval, the chin perhaps a little too massive, the nose slightly aquiline, and like ivory, with beautifully shaped nostrils. Those who like a little cherry mouth might have thought hers too large, but its shape was perfect, the edge of the under lip as sharply defined as a statue's, and the colour trenchant from the softest white to the most intense red. Her eyes were beautiful, of a dark grey, the under lid slightly discoloured; not deep

and mysterious, but full, sharp, and observant—not at all tender, Ashton then thought. He admired the development of her perceptive organs, found her head very shapely, with its thick folded locks of ashen blonde, and might have considered her face a little sensual, but for the remarkably intelligent form of her brows. She appeared about twenty-three or twenty-four years old.

As soon as Ashton looked at her, and heard her speak, he understood the embarrassment that had puzzled him in the Lieutenant's manner, and also the tone in which he hastened to name her as his "wife." There seemed something equivocal about this beautiful young woman in her present position, that required the voucher of that announcement. She was evidently not what is called a "lady," though her type was very fine. When she spoke, her charm (to an educated listener) partly vanished. Her voice was not unmusical, but her language and pronunciation were incorrect and vulgar. She jumbled her h's in thanking Ashton for having behaved so kind to Mr. Hartley (as he had been telling of her); she should have been alarmed about him, but he was so often detained of nights. He had hard work early and late sometimes, and enjoyed but poor health. And she hoped Mr. Ashton would stop and dine after his hot walk.

Her manners were not ungraceful, though rather affected. It was the feminine elegance badly self-educated.

Ashton was going to decline this invitation, but the Lieutenant seconded it with an evident wish that it should be accepted.

"Do, pray do," said he; "and when it gets cooler, I can walk part of the way back with you, by the shingles."

Mrs. Robert Hartley looked at her beautiful bare arms with an unembarrassed laugh, and said she must go back to her kitchen and see after the dinner. Mr. Hartley had brought her up in such a hurry, she forgot even to pull down her sleeves. But she couldn't trust anything

to the girl;—and so saying, she vanished. There was no vulgarity in the rolled-up sleeves, or personal attention to the cooking, and a positive absence of it in her freedom from false shame about the matter. To speak of her as of a picture, the forms seemed all good, but partly spoiled by bad colour.

Ashton settled it in his own mind that the Lieutenant, affectionate, but deprived of family affection, unhappy, poor, and reckless, had taken to wife this beautiful daughter of the people; partly for her beauty's sake, perhaps, but probably also for some attaching qualities that might promise to solace his existence.

Dinner was excellently cooked, and neatly served in the little parlour, by the hands of the small servant-girl. Then Mrs. Robert Hartley, in a fresh light cotton gown, a clean collar, and her lovely hair smoothed into satin reflections, came and seated herself with her husband and their guest.

A couple of hours after, Ashton and his host set off to walk back to Seabay, by the beach, under the cliffs.

Hartley first gathered every one of his dear Black Princes, and put them into a paper cornucopia. When he parted with Ashton, at the end of an hour's talk that had floated their acquaintance into friendship, he sent on his little treasure to Mrs. Ashton, not disguising an artless pride in the gift.

CHAPTER X.

THE WIDOW'S OPINION OF MR. HARTLEY.

WHEN the widow came in from her evening walk, she found Ashton sitting in the verandah smoking a cigar. She liked the smell of tobacco, she said; dear Willie used to smoke. So she sat down in the other corner of the rustic bench, and asked her brother-in-law about Mr.

Robert Hartley and Mudditon. She expressed much kindly interest in the coastguard officer; said his poor sad face haunted her: no doubt he had behaved wrongly to his mother and brother (Ashton had repeated to her the fraternal narrative), but he had evidently suffered so much, that she thought all might now be forgiven and forgotten; and his brother seemed so very amiable a person, it most likely would.

Meantime she hoped he would often come over to them, as she had asked him to do. He seemed so fond of a flower garden, and it would be a change from that Mudditon place, which was such a wretched hole, Tatt told her Dick said. And he must be so lonely there, poor fellow!

"Well," said Ashton, "not lonely exactly: he's married."

"Married!"

And thereupon Ashton described Mrs. Robert Hartley, and said she certainly was as handsome a woman as he had ever seen.

"Horrid creature!" cried Mrs. Ashton. "How can you, Montague?"

"Can I what?" said Ashton, astonished.

"Why, of course you don't believe she's his wife?"

"How curious women are," remarked Ashton, half-smiling; "it never even occurred to me to doubt it. He introduced her to me distinctly as his wife."

"Of course he did, as a blind. Ah, my dear Montague," continued the widow solemnly, "I have seen a good deal of the world, and, I am sorry to say, I know only too much of its wicked ways."

"The deuce you do!" thought Ashton; but he only puffed out a long wreath of smoke, under cover of which he composed his risible muscles before he said, "But what makes you think the Lieutenant told me a falsehood?"

"Oh!" replied Louisa, the kind of woman you described!"

"I only said she was excessively beautiful, and evi-

dently not a lady. But many men have married beneath their own grade."

"Ah! well, I am convinced of what I say. And, besides, why did he look guilty when I asked him to come here, and offered to go and see him?"

"He looked embarrassed, certainly. But that was probably from a painful consciousness that you might decline to know his wife, as so much your inferior in point of education and breeding. At least, that is my inference."

"Ah; well; we won't talk about it. But your description of the woman is enough. A great bold thing like that! Yet she has contrived to bewitch even you."

"Even me!" cried Ashton, with a hearty laugh; "are my organs of Resistance so developed?"

"I mean," said the widow, looking severe, "that you are more fastidious than *most* men. I am sorry to say I have found their standard of female excellence very low. Nine men out of ten *prefer* bad women to good. I have studied your sex a good deal, Montague, and know them better than you may fancy."

It is always some innocent little woman like widow Louisa, with her guarded drawing room existence, her twenty-two years, and her soft childlike face, that says these things.

"Well," said Ashton, "seriously, Louisa, I can assure you that I am certain Mrs. Robert Hartley has a right to that name. Her husband told me the whole story, and I have no reason to suppose he does not wish me to repeat it to you. She was the wife of a sailmaker employed in the dockyard at Plymouth, and they had a house in Devonport, in which Mr. Hartley lodged at one time. He was ill there, and she nursed him very kindly. Her husband was a drunkard, and often beat her. Robert Hartley several times saved her from his brutal violence. But he assured me he then had no stronger feeling for her than compassion. At last, during his absence, her husband died suddenly—was killed by an accident—and then he married her. I should say that her attachment

to him, induced at first by gratitude, and then his own gratitude for her attachment, and a sense of loneliness, were what brought about the marriage. It is certainly not an unhappy one for him, but the source of all his comfort. However, married they are, you may depend on it; so that I hope you will receive the poor Lieutenant here, and be gracious to him; even if you don't think proper to associate with his wife."

"My dear brother," said the widow, who had had time to get over her little private feminine annoyance at the beauty of Mrs. Robert Hartley, "I shall be very glad to see the poor man whenever he will come. I told him so, and you know I am not a changeable person. And about knowing *her*—by-and-bye, that is, when I deliberately make *any* new acquaintance, and if we stay here—I will just do whatever you advise me to do. You are, and ought to be, my guide and counsellor, as well as best friend now. And I shall never, I hope, go counter to your advice in anything, as long as I live. I should be an ungrateful wretch if I didn't feel and say this."

"You feel and say a great deal more than I deserve, Louisa," said Ashton; and then changed the course of the conversation by going into the drawing-room, and bringing out the Lieutenant's cornucopia of Black Princes.

"He cut off every man of them for you," said he; "there's not a royal highness left in his plot."

"How kind!" said the widow, much pleased; "I am sure, whatever faults he may have, he has the same good heart as his brother."

"Humph!" said Ashton.

"I daresay Mr. Hartley will call again soon," pursued Louisa. "I thought him an extremely nice person; his manly grief at the loss of his mother was quite touching. He is certainly less plain than the poor dear forlorn-looking Lieutenant."

"Yes. He's fat and well-liking," said Ashton. "But it's a horrid way one gets into of pecking at one's fellow-creatures. I suppose he *has* his redeeming points, like the rest of us."

"You don't like him!" cried the widow, surprised.

"No," said Ashton; "I prefer the forlorn Lieutenant."

And a silence ensued. Ashton fell into a cogitation about the two Hartleys, the beautiful Mrs. Robert, wives, and marriage in general.

At length he propounded the following query to the widow: "I say, Louisa, should you think it better to marry a person one likes, or a person one dislikes?"

Widow Louisa laughed, but Ashton remained quite grave.

"As far as I can judge," said he, "I should say it would be better and safer to dislike the person you marry. Don't you see? The rule is, that you pitch your standard too high, or too low; think too well or too ill of people, till you are intimate with them. Then the revulsion is sure to be equally unjust each way; excessive admiration is apt to become excessive disgust, and *vice versa*. So that it really seems safer to begin, as Mrs. Malaprop says, with a little aversion."

The widow, laughing, as she generally did, when her brother-in-law blew his theory-bubbles, went away into the drawing-room by the open window, and put the Black Princes up to their necks in a glass of water.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ASHTON LOSES HIS PHILOSOPHY.

It is nearly two years since the Ashtons went to live at Seabay, in Myrtle Cottage, and they are living there still. The widow likes the pretty, quiet place, and there is nothing to attract her more in any other. After a few months, the Rector called on her, and villas, cottages, and terraces followed the reverend example. The lovely widow is popular, and considered extremely interesting—perhaps all the more that she generally declines Seabay

invitations, even to the smallest of tea-parties, although she is charming and kind to everybody who visits her. Ashton is not stationary, but often visits her myrtle bower. He has been in London now for some weeks, paying a visit to an old friend. He is glad that the poor little woman is recovering her natural youthful spirits, and is very civil to all their new acquaintance, who enliven her secluded existence. He is supposed to be deeply, though silently, attached to the Rector's second daughter, Eliza, to whom he lent a volume of poetry, in which some stanzas of an amatory tendency, commencing, "Those eyes of blue," are wildly pencil-marked. Miss Eliza Lipleigh has eyes of blue. Not that Ashton is conscious of that circumstance, or that the pencil-marks are of his making. Could they have been scored by the trembling hand of young Octavius Bibbs, by whom the book was previously borrowed? Octavius is a youth of eighteen, frantically in love with his sister's governess, a fishy-eyed lady of thirty-five.

The only visitor at Myrtle Cottage whom Ashton does not receive with a very cordial greeting, is Mr. Hartley of Hartley Hall. Commodious as his family seat is, that gentleman appears to find one beside the lovely Mrs. Ashton very comfortable also; for he trots the eighteen miles of hilly road from one to the other pretty often.

Ashton does not like him at all better than he did the first time he perused his head; and has never discovered those redeeming organs that his charitable philosophy will not altogether deny him. Robert Hartley visits them at much rarer intervals, notwithstanding that Mudditon is but five or six miles off.

The coastguard Lieutenant continues to live at his dismal station, in his queer little house, with his beautiful housewife, and his summer friends, the flowers—very poor, quiet, and uncomplaining.

He told Ashton long ago that ever since his father died he had not received the least assistance from his family. He added, very simply and candidly, that his father had made him a liberal allowance, which he had

recklessly rather than extravagantly outrun, and had paid his debts more than once. "So that I have not the least right to expect to be helped now."

Mrs. Ashton has never yet seen Mrs. Robert Hartley. Her husband has, far from pushing her forward, sensitively drawn her back from any opening to their personal acquaintance. Things are thus in and about Seabay.

Ashton has been away, as I said before, about six weeks, but has returned rather unexpectedly this fine evening of latter May. He walks in as usual from the verandah, through the drawing-room window, and the first thing he beholds is the back of a head by no means unknown to him, a head painful to his feelings as a phrenologist and a philanthropist, a head that is all back and no top—the head of Mr. Hartley, of Hartley Hall.

The body of that respected gentleman is snugly dividing the sofa with Mrs. Ashton, who sits opposite to him at her end of it, looking sweeter, fresher, daintier than ever.

Ashton notices this, and that she has left off her deep mourning weeds. Her black silk dress is illumined by white lace and lilac ribbons, and her brown curls cluster once more about her girlish face. She is talking and listening to Mr. Hartley with a soft pink on her cheeks, and her lovely robin eyes shine bright as ever. She starts up at the apparition of her brother-in-law, and runs to him, holding out both her hands, glad to see him, and telling him so.

How different from that woe-begone, forlorn little figure, every young charm drowned in tears, stifled in crape and crimped muslin, which met him with the same gesture, which ran to his brotherly heart for shelter not quite two years ago!

I don't know that Ashton, who is a philosopher, feels any pain at the thought that his brother is wept no longer. I believe he has no high-screwed notions of female delicacy on this point. He has often said that he thought the nun-widow system a bad one to encourage;

that nothing could be more natural, or less to be deprecated, than for a young woman who has sincerely loved one husband, to take another when death has robbed her of her first companion, and time has brought her its infallible consolation. Attaching blame to such an act he has called a kind of sour censure, that he is directly opposed to.

He has often said that people in this civilized world have a method of making one another uncomfortable, by exacting unnatural superhuman sacrifices to false, overstrained notions of duty and delicacy—a method that is one of all the means we take to increase the friction of social machinery, and engender misery and hypocrisy.

He has always declared his decided opposition to this fanatical kind of social religion. So that, with these opinions, he is, I am sure, capable of sincerely rejoicing to see his brother's young widow consoled and bright again. Only, why is it this Mr. Hartley, with his shocking head, and his smooth florid face, and his smooth florid speech, that must be William's successor?

Why must she decline from Hyperion to this satyr? He recalls his handsome young brother, when they parted for ever twelve years ago, on the deck of the *Indiaman*. He feels the loving grip of his hand, he sees the tears in the boy's good kind eyes, the quiver of his lip; he hears his last good-bye broken into a sob . . . and he touches Mr. Hartley's extended fingers, and he looks in his cunning pale eyes, and he listens to his voice, artificially smoothened, in a sort of angry dream. Not angry with Louisa, but vaguely vexed with fate. For he sees at a glance that this marriage is to be; that Louisa has promised, or will shortly promise, to take Mr. Hartley, of Hartley Hall, for her second husband. He has seen it afar off these six months past; now he sees it closer. Well, may she be happy! may he be better than his head! Ah, what a head William had!—and again and again as he sits there facing the widow, he sees the husband of her past side by side

with the husband of her future! How could she!—how could she!—

All of a sudden he finds that he is waxing unjust and cruel to her, that he is savagely quoting Hamlet and Richard the Third at her in his heart. He gets up to go and recover his philosophy, and listen to his guardian-angels (those twain you wot of), away from that which irritates him in spite of their divine whisperings.

"I will come down again in ten minutes," says Ashton; "I hope you will give me some tea. Where's Helen?"

"Out with Tatt and Mr. Hartley's Edward. You haven't seen little Ned. Such a beautiful boy! Come down soon, dear Montague."

And even as he walks upstairs, he hears himself mutter, "Shallow, changing—woman!" and breaks off into a prolonged whistle of vexation at himself.

When Ashton is alone with his sister-in-law, the evening after Mr. Hartley's departure, he fully expects that she will announce to him the coming event. He is mistaken. She is cheerful, animated, charming, affectionate to him; but there is no hesitation, no embarrassment, no sentence begun and not ended—it is plain she has as yet no delicate avowal to make or withhold. She tells him gaily all the Seabay chit-chat, and listens to his London news. When she leaves him to go into the verandah and smoke his crowning cigar, he hears her, as she runs lightly upstairs to bed, break out into a little song. She is happy again! But this time, is it through love or vanity?

CHAPTER XII.

LITTLE HELEN INTERRUPTS CONVERSATION.

A FEW days after, Helen's birthday arrived. She was five years old. She was a joyous, pretty little thing—

eager, excitable, sweet-tempered, intellectual. She was an active, restless sprite, like almost every healthy child; precocious, like most only children; reading was already a passion—a story-book quieted her wildest mood, like a charm. Reading story-books appeared to her surely the best thing there was to do in the world.

• The worst, without any doubt, must be that lamentable hemming, of which mamma already exacted two inches per diem.

On this birthday Mr. Hartley brought her a present; she received it with a burst of tears; it was a work-box. She had never taken to him kindly, but from that moment she considered him the open enemy of her peace, and placed him in the category of those wicked magicians who are chiefly occupied in oppressing youthful princesses—Unkymonky representing the good genius who invariably takes their part. Helen dearly loved her uncle—but the child adored her mother. Her uncle's birthday-gift consoled her for the malice she ascribed to the wicked magician's: it was a new volume of fairy-tales. When Helen got a new story-book, she instantly, then and there, whenever and wherever it was, began to read it, and never left off, unless compelled till she had reached the last word.

Then she gave a deep sigh, and came up out of the literary gulf, serious and thoughtful for a while, like a little diver laden with new ideas for pearls. Helen had a curious fancy about a study. On either side of the fireplace, in the cottage drawing-room, there were niches, filled up, as is common in homely little homes like Myrtle Cottage, by cupboards with doors. One of these lower closets was empty, and this Helen adopted for her favourite reading nook.

• Why it pleased the child to seek that hole, and, half-shutting the door, to sit herself in there, her back to the wall, her knees as high as her nose, to read her story-books, from the first page to the last—who can tell?

Can the wisest man or the tenderest mother fathom the mystery of a child's mind, or more than blindly

guess at its inexpressible passionate fancies, joys, and despairs?

So Helen carried her uncle's precious present to her singular den, crept in, ensconced herself as in a berth on board ship, and opened the book on her knees. There never was any Queen on her throne half so happy as little Helen in her hole, at that moment of her fifth birthday! When she first took possession of her cupboard there was no one in the room; but presently the widow came in from the garden, accompanied by Mr. Hartley.

Helen kept very still, with a vague idea that the wicked magician would somehow wreck her happiness if he espied her.

She went on reading: "The fairy drew from beneath her robe of silver gauze a small bag of crimson velvet, filled with the most delicious dried sweetmeats and brilliant fruits, spun round with wreaths of sugar-candy."

Helen gave a little sigh of pleasure, and saw the crimson velvet bag quite plain. Mamma had a green one. Oh! if it could be filled with macaroons and comfits!

"But when the Queen examined them, what bore the appearance of sugar-candy was in reality diamonds; and in place of pips, each preserved orange enclosed pearls of surprising value."

"Pearls and diamonds are nothing but stones," thought little Helen; "Unkymonky said so—I'd rather have had real oranges and things, after all."

As she looked off her book to make this mental commentary, she observed that the wicked magician was sitting quite close to her mamma, and whispering (which Helen called shu-shuing); that he had got hold of her mamma's hand, and that her mamma's face was red, as if she had done something naughty, and Mr. Hartley had found it out. Only he didn't look angry, and he had something in his other hand. What? Miss Mouse peeped out of her hole, with bright brown eyes.

"Oh, it's a ring!—such a pretty shiny ring!—and he wants to give it to mamma, just as if it was *her* birthday! Why won't she have it? Why does she shake her head? What does make mamma look so red and funny?"

But Helen soon got tired of peeping—the scene in real life was not half so interesting as her fairy-tale. She was ready to return to the wonderful bag, when—oh, there was Mr. Hartley saying his prayers to mamma! and oh, mamma crying!"——

"Mamma! mamma!" Little Helen, tumbling out of her cupboard, hurled herself at the astonished pair. "Mamma, mamma, *don't* cly!"

She wept, herself; she sobbed, she trembled with excitement; her little flaming face was convulsed with grief and rage; with two tiny white fists she frantically pummelled that respectable gentleman who had thrown himself at her mamma's feet.

"How dare you make mamma cly! you hollible, udley man,—you—you—you *Letch!*" And she pummelled away.

He got up, and seated himself, silently; but regarded the little thing with nothing less than love in his bilious eye. It was a ridiculous situation; but had the man's nature been wise and loving—had there been the least sweetness in it, he would have kissed that poor baby, and loved it, for its tender little heart's sake.

He did not kiss the child, but sat glowering at it, letting it beat him. As for the widow, vexed, agitated, crimson, half laughing, half crying, she dumbly strove to draw away her little fury. Suddenly Helen caught the baleful eye of the wicked magician. Never before had such an eye looked on her. She gasped, threw herself terrified against her mother, burying her face, and shrieked lamentably—

"Unkymonky! Unkymonky!"

But Uncle Montague is out of hearing. Oh, poor little Helen!

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO CHILDREN.

SEABAY soon became aware that the lovely widow was to be removed by marriage. It made no valid objection. If some ill-natured remarks were thrown into one scale of public opinion, at least twice as many kindly ones kept the other down. People alluded to the marriage as "the happy event."

Here was an interesting widow with her fatherless girl; there, an interesting widower with his motherless boy. The pair seemed to fit like two pieces of the dissected and jumbled puzzle of life. They appeared to have been born, married, and widowed on purpose for each other.

Seabay had not the honour of Mr. Hartley's acquaintance. Hartley Hall had always patronized another nearer bathing-place on the coast; and the family seat majestically held aloof from verandahed villas and lath-and-plaster terraces.

But Hartley of Hartley Hall was too great a man not to be known by sight or repute all over his county. Repute spoke well of him. The clergyman of his parish cited him with pious enthusiasm, as an example of one in an exalted station doing his duty to God and his neighbour. Had he not family prayers as the clock struck nine and ten? Did not his sleek head appear above the walls of his family pew twice each Sunday? Did he not exercise hospitality with unstinted venison and claret? His pedigree, his life, and his dinners appeared equally irreproachable. Few heard the low breath of impeachment that ran through the clamour of good report, like the whisper of an accusing angel, that charged him with the ruin of a brother, the broken heart of a wife, and said that he had never, except in trumpeted charity, bestowed a dinner but on the neighbour who did not need one.

Hartley Hall (which it is time to sketch) is a fine old English country house, possessed ever since its erection by a race of fine old English gentlemen. It rears itself on the side of a little parky hill, at the bottom of which darts an eager brook, spreading not far off into a small lake. It stands about ten miles from the cathedral town of Toxeter, and the country around is unsurpassably beautiful. There is a distant view of the Channel from the upper south windows of the Hall, through a great V that the steep hills make. The Hall itself is picturesque, not stately, of that mellow brick which harmonizes so well with English atmosphere and landscape, warming their greyness, and partly overgrown with myrtle and roses, ivy and Virginian creeper.

Of course it has its entrance hall, hung around with pikes, and guns, and bows; also adorned by trophies of the chase; also by tattered banners; also by numerous execrable old portraits. You can tell in a moment that this has been the family seat of Gentlemen for several generations. That is, it has been the residence of personages rich enough to live in this big house, and to have their portraits painted, and to keep hounds.

And what a delightful and soothing reflection, what an unfailing source of consolation, must that have proved to Hartley of Hartley Hall in every trial of life! It must have been such a comfort to him, not only to know who his grandfather was, but not to mind anyone else knowing it. How different was his position from the deplorable one of Snooks, whose own father was an industrious mechanic! while Hartley of Hartley Hall had from generation to generation been a gentleman who lived at home at ease, who had probably nothing to do, and did it Respectably.

Grinston Hartley (that is, our Hartley of Hartley Hall) was born a younger son: a family living had been saving up for him till he was twenty-two, when his eldest brother died, unexpectedly and unmarried, and he became the heir of six thousand a-year.

He found himself at that period secretly engaged to

the beautiful daughter of a clergyman with whom he had been reading for orders; and took considerable credit to himself for fulfilling his engagement six months after his brother's death. Perhaps he was right in supposing that he would have been justified, in the steely eyes of society, had he, on this accession of dignity and money, advanced his claim to some dignified and moneyed bride.

It need have cost no more than a broken boyish vow, to say nothing of the heart of a lovely and amiable but insignificant young lady. For my part, I believe it would have been the quickest and mercifullest way of doing what he did; since it is very certain that he was slowly putting his wife to death during all the ten years of her most sad marriage. The poor lady presented him with four sons, puny tiny fellows, who each whimpered faintly for a year or two, and then let go their little feeble clutch on life. But two years before the mother herself departed to be at rest, there came into the world a more determined little stranger—with a healthy and beautiful form, with a round face, fresh and cheerful as a cherry-blossom.

After the death of Grinston's wife, the dowager Mrs. Hartley kindly consented to return to the family seat from her dingy seclusion in Bryanston Square. Once more she reigned the despotic queen of Hartley Hall, from attic to basement; presided in black velvet over the venison and claret; or curdled the blood of little Edward in his nursery, as he felt her coming ere she came, in the rustle of her black silken morning skirts. Mrs. Grandmamma Hartley did not appear to be a lady of violent emotions, yet she was passion's slave like the weakest of us. Her ruling passion was to rule. She died about six years after her re-installation at the Hall. Her grandson, Edward, was just eight years old. An intelligent, handsome, lying little fellow, oppressed into hypocrisy, having his mother's beautiful face, his grandfather Hartley's candid loving look, and apparently not a line or hint of his father, or his father's mother. His father had taken small notice of him hitherto, having left

him altogether in the dread hands of his grandame. The day she died, his papa sent for him after dinner, and sternly "hoped he was as sorry as he ought to be." To which the young gentleman replied, primly, in a little falsetto voice, "I don't think, dear papa, I shall ever be quite happy again, though I know I ought to remember that dearest grandmamma is gone to heaven."

That morning his old nurse had said to him, "Master Teddy, your grandma's dead; you'll see her never no more."

On which the heir of Hartley Hall had clapped his hands, and exultantly exclaimed, "Then no more Bible!"

And if he seized the Book, threw it on the floor, and danced upon it, was it the child's fault? Or hers, who had held up before his infant eyes birch, bread-and-water, and Bible, tied together like a ghastly fasces?

Our own dear little Helen was not a hypocrite, and I doubt if the worst educational tyranny could ever have made her one.

The day after her birthday she was sitting on a stool at her mother's feet, painfully accomplishing her task of hemming.

"Helen," said the widow, diligently joining two strips of muslin, "you must try and like Mr. Hartley very much, because we are going to live with him and Edward, and then he will be your papa."

"Mamma!" cried the little girl, breathlessly, "I thought papa was in your pocketthanksif drawer?"

The widow had a miniature of William Ashton in his red coat, which she kept in that depository, and which had been taken out to be kissed by his little daughter night and morning, as long as Helen could distinctly remember anything. Papa's picture came as regularly to her lips as her prayers.

"That—that is your own papa," said the widow in a low voice, embarrassed, and almost ready to cry; "he can never come back to us. God has taken him to Himself, away from you and me, for ever. But Mr.

Hartley loves us dearly, and will do all he can to make us happy. And we must do all we can for him in return, mustn't we?"

"But mamma," said Helen, "ain't we velly happy with Unkymonky? Don't you like him better than Mr. Hartley? *I* do, I'm sure. Oh, an huddled and ever so much times!"

"Unkymonky is going back to India. He is glad we should have Mr. Hartley, to take care of us when he is gone."

"But, mamma—" persisted Helen.

The widow began to be vexed, and to resent her little daughter's opposition.

"Helen," said she, rather severely, "you were a very naughty child yesterday. I was shocked at you. It was your birthday, or I must have punished you. Nobody will love you if you give way to such naughty fits of passion and violence. I hope you will go up to Mr. Hartley, as soon as he comes this afternoon, and say you are sorry, and ask him to forgive you."

Helen hung her curled head, and the tears began to drop on her little hands, and on her scrap of hemming.

"Do you hear me, Helen?"

"Mamma," said the child, in a burst of sobbing, "I'm—I'm affaid—I don't think I *am* sorry."

"You are not sorry that you beat Mr. Hartley?"

"No, mamma," said Helen, conscience-stricken, but honest; "I—I think I'm glad. Because, if you tell me not, I never can beat him again. And—and now I *have* once."

"This is quite shocking! What has made you take this naughty dislike to him?"

"Mamma," said Helen, earnestly and tearfully, "he hasn't got a nice face like Unkymonky, and papa in the gleen cover; and, besides—*indeed*, mamma, I do think, he's a wicked magician!"

"I do think you are very naughty and silly," said her mother, half laughing; "we must have no more fairy tales, to fill your head with nonsense. I shall be a wicked old fairy next."

"Oh! no, mamma," cried her artless and loving little flatterer, hugging her; "you—you are exactly like the beautiful fairy *Coquette*, that came to the woodcutter's cottage, if you only had got a silver gauze gown, with a star on your head."

CHAPTER XIV

BLUEBEARD.

ASHTON had certainly expressed as much satisfaction as he honestly could, when his sister-in-law announced her matrimonial engagement to him. In about six months he must return to India, and it might be years before he came back to England, if he lived to see it again. It was well that he would not leave his present charge unprotected. Certainly, he could not personally like this man whom his sister had chosen to succeed poor Willie. He shared the antipathy of his little niece; but then he could hardly assign any more reasonable ground for it. He knew nothing positively against Mr. Hartley, and had heard nothing positively to his disadvantage. He was as highly respectable as most middle-aged gentlemen are, who have a family seat, and live in it, and a family pew, and sit in it. His conduct to his brother seemed harsh; but who can be sure of judging fairly in a family quarrel? His brother himself exonerated him. His person and manners happened to be inexpressibly disagreeable to Ashton, but it was evident they were not so to widow Louisa, and they could not exactly annoy him in India.

Besides, and above all, he had not lived with his pretty sister-in-law for two years, and failed to draw her brain-chart pretty accurately. She had a will of her own, if ever woman had, and her will was to marry Mr. Hartley. Sweetly, and sincerely too, she had protested that her brother-in-law should guide her in all things, and she

could take no step unsanctioned by him. But Ashton was better aware than she was herself that she had never yet been guided by any one, and that, at present at least, she was utterly incapable of submission. Her father had cruelly spoiled her, and she had rebelled the first time he had crossed her inclination and will; her husband had idolized her, and if she had never disobeyed him, it was probably because poor Willy had never claimed her obedience. Ashton was only her brother-in-law; what real right or power had he to interfere with this unbroken will?

He had an uncomfortable suspicion that this Hartley of Hartley Hall, for all his smooth-spoken, disinterested wooing, was a close-fisted curmudgeon and a tyrant. He thought the poor little wilful woman was entering a moral climate quite untried and dangerously trying. A pitiless north-windy, bare, bleak, mountain-top existence for her over whom even the storm had burst in a sheltered valley. But he also thought that Hartley of Hartley Hall had found his match, and would not secure a patient Grizzle in the lovely little fine lady; he would make no meek victim of Mrs. Louisa; but God help her, the family seat would be a stormy house-at-home! It was the thought of his little Helen that most depressed Ashton. He saw plainly enough how hard this man's temper was, even towards his own child, and how probable it was that he would dislike and oppress a superfluous little step-daughter. Helen was not a spoiled child, her mother as yet ruled her firmly and well. No, little Helen was not spoiled but tenderly loved, and disclosed her little sweet soul in her atmosphere of love, as frankly and fearlessly as a daisy in a May morning. How would that stepsire ruthlessly drive his iron ploughshare of domestic tyranny over this wee modest crimson-tipped flower!

"My dear little dove!" said Ashton to himself sorrowfully, as he sat waiting for Mr. Hartley to begin the conversation that day after dinner. He knew the prospering wooer had come on purpose to have this interview of etiquette with his fair widow's ostensible protector.

Ashton could object to none of the suggested arrangements. If the settlements proposed were by no means liberal for a rich gentleman like Hartley of Hartley Hall, it was impossible for a poor one like Ashton to insist on better, where the bride took nothing in her hand to the family seat but her tiny pension of a major's widow.

"I apprehend there is nothing to be expected from Colonel Danbaye," said Mr. Hartley, leaning back in his chair and putting the tips of all his dead white fingers together.

"Nothing, I should think," replied Ashton. "I remember him well in old times, when he and my father were country neighbours, and he was the most obstinate person I ever knew. (And perhaps his daughter will be the most obstinate person *you* ever knew," he added to himself, with an irresistible smile in his sleeve at the complacent gentleman before him.)

"Ah," said the unconscious victim regardless of his doom, shutting his unpleasant eyes, with an indifferent air.

"Mind," continued Ashton, "I know nothing of Colonel Danbaye's intentions, except from what his daughter says. But he kept his wrath and resentment against her in her bereavement and need, and gave her up to grief and penury without the least mercy; and one would think, if he didn't relent then, he is not likely to do so now."

"Ah," murmured Mr. Hartley again, with closed eyes.

"Mrs. Nettlefold, his sister, has, I fancy, considerable influence over him; but I doubt if she has been a peacemaker between father and child."

"Nettlefold!" said Mr. Hartley, opening his eyes; "are you aware that the clergyman of my parish, holding, in fact, the Family living, is a Mr. Drewe, whose eldest son is Mr. Nettlefold's heir-at-law?"

"Indeed," replied Ashton, "I must have heard, but I had quite forgotten the name of Mr. Nettlefold's sister."

"Mr. Nettlefold is not a man of Family, I rather think," remarked Hartley of Hartley Hall, superiorly.

He could not for the life of him utter three sentences without a conventional phrase.

"I really know nothing about him," replied Ashton ; adding, " Well, Mr. Hartley, I suppose there is no more to be said between us on this interesting subject. I am a poor man at present ; promises are all I can offer my sister, except hearty and affectionate good wishes. But now or in future, whatever power I may have, my will must be to serve her to the extent of it. She is, and must ever be, my sister, and dear to me."

"Men have made large fortunes in India. I hear they have splendid appointments in the Civil Service," said Mr. Hartley, *auri sacra fames* in his bilious orbs. Ashton regarded him curiously with his own bright intellectual eye, and an inspiration came to him.

"I have adopted my little niece," observed he, as if by the way. "She is my daughter, even if I should marry (which I don't think likely), and have half-a-dozen other children. So these splendid appointments you are kind enough to cheer me with the hope of, will be all in your step-daughter's favour."

"My dear little dove!" he cried mentally ; "perched on the sacred pagoda tree, perhaps thou wilt not be flattered by this yellow-eyed vulture."

"Ah," said Mr. Hartley once more, smiling amiably with all his might ; "upon my word, little Miss Helen will be quite a charge—an Indian heiress!"

The man and his manner were so thoroughly artificial, that even Ashton could not tell if he were pleased or vexed. But little Helen was at least placed in a different position henceforth. Her uncle had consigned her to the family seat with an endorsement that secured her from contempt. That portion, never due because always prepaid, of a poor relation.

So the marriage of the widow and the widower was formally arranged. How much love there was on either side remained to be proved. At present the widow's really appeared most open to doubt.

I used to visit about among a good many magicians,

long ago, fairy godmothers, and such folk; scudding among enchanted isles, when the breeze of a joyful dawn blew free in the silken sails of infancy; when I believed everything, and knew nothing. Of course I am wiser now, and know a great deal, and believe very little; and I have other fish to fry than those which came out of the Enchanted Pools.

However, I recollect that the wicked magicians used to be very clever, though far from respectable; so that I do not know which of them Helen could have had in her eye as the prototype of her step-papa. But I was intimately acquainted in my youth with a rich gentleman called Bluebeard, who was not exactly a conjurer, I believe,—just like Mr. Hartley. I remember that this personage had also a handsome Family Seat; that he ran after pretty women in rather a cold-blooded manner; that he liked having a beautiful young wife to kill at his leisure; and when one was done with looked out for another.

CHAPTER XV

WEATHER-BOUND AT MUDDITON.

TIME was flying, and the widow's marriage, fixed for the third week in July, was at hand.

There had been a difference of opinion between these lovers respecting the performance, or rather the performer, of the ceremony. Mr. Hartley had expressed his idea on the subject in a note as neat as himself. It was, that the Reverend Peter Drewe should be the man. The Reverend Peter might be called his own clergyman; holding the family living, resident at the gates of the family seat, and might reasonably expect to do the clerical business of the family. Besides which, he was distantly connected, through his wife, with the bride herself.

To which the lovely widow responded, in her beautiful firm little characters, that she "did not yet belong to the Family in question; that she was a parishioner of Mr. Lipley's, who might far more reasonably feel hurt at being set aside for a stranger; that she had received much friendly civility from the Seabay Rectory; that Mrs. Lipley and her daughters had *most kindly* offered to take charge of Helen during her absence; and as for the Drewes being her connections (if they could be so called), that was *no* recommendation, she could assure him. And, finally, that she wished Mr. Lipley to marry her."

This was the first tussle for mastery, and Ashton watched it curiously. Not that he much doubted the result in the present stage of their relations. Of course the lady had her way; and, in return for entire submission, she was graciously pleased, when she next saw her slave, to signify that she and her brother would be happy to see the Drewes at breakfast on the 26th of July, not as connections of hers, but simply as friends of her dear Mr. Hartley. Which, of course, immediately brought the smooth red-and-white countenance of that enamoured gentleman in contact with her dainty little palm.

The wedding was to be as quiet as possible. Another triumph of widow Louisa's, whom good taste, or a deeper feeling, made immovable on this point also. However, Mr. Hartley bided his time, consoling himself with the thought of those proper and decorous demonstrations of joy and grandeur which would await his return with his bride to the family seat.

Ashton was to leave Myrtle Cottage for London shortly after the happy pair, who set off Rhineward, on the then orthodox tour, directly after breakfast. Tatt would only stay to wind up the household matters at the Cottage, and then betake herself to the Rectory with little Helen.

A few days before the 26th, Ashton set off to walk to Muddition by the shingles. He went to take leave of the coast-guard Lieutenant, for a couple of months.

Mr. Hartley had solemnly invited, and Louisa had affectionately urged, him to come and spend with her, in her new home, the last weeks of his stay in England. He had looked at little Helen, away from the obnoxious Head, and consented.

When Robert Hartley had learned from Ashton, some time since, that the charming little lady, who always smiled so sweetly on him when they met, was to marry his brother, surprise, that was unmistakeably painful, had come into his kind and melancholy face. He made no comment on the news, however; he did not even say that he hoped they would be happy. He said not a word of any kind for a considerable time after he heard it.

Ashton had rather a dreary walk. The weather was depressing, and threatened rain. Grey sky, grey sea, grey shingle—it might have been an Indian ink picture, but for the warm red of the tall cliffs that towered up on his left hand. The leaden water came rolling sullenly shoreward, and ever tumbled a great surly billow on the beach, to draw it back growling and exasperated.

Ashton found the Lieutenant talking to some of his men near the flagstaff, and received his usual kindly welcome. He looked fagged, yet more animated than usual. A "run" had been expected, and he had not been in bed for two or three nights till daybreak. After a short time they went in to tea. Mrs. Hartley was not in the little parlour at first, but presently appearing she shook hands with Ashton, and sat down to the table.

He immediately perceived that something was amiss with his friend's wife. She hardly spoke a word, though usually a little too talkative and even flippant. Her beautiful face was extremely pale, the corners of her mouth were drawn down, and, sitting quite silent, she often moodily contracted her brows. By-and-bye she complained of headache, muttered something about thunder in the air, and, abruptly rising, left the room. Her husband looked after her with affectionate concern, and in a few moments followed, telling Ashton he would persuade her, if really unwell, to go to bed. But he

came back cheerful; said she had laughed at his anxiety, and was gone into the village, declaring that the open air would cure her directly. Ashton and his friend then fell into a talk about many things—the coming marriage of course among them.

Still the Lieutenant made no remark that could infer misgiving or regret. But he said, in his shy way:—“Look here, Ashton—I should like to give her this tiger-skin. I’ve got nothing else, you know, to offer her. But perhaps, if you told her how pleased I should be, she would take it. I killed him myself in India.”

“I am sure, my dear Hartley, she will accept it most gratefully, and value it for your sake. She likes you so much.”

The Lieutenant’s face brightened. “She is always kind. Then I’ll send it over to-morrow by one of the men. But do you think my brother will let her keep it?”

“Let her!” repeated Ashton, with an amused smile. “My sister-in-law, and yours that is to be, is a spoiled little beauty, and most people (myself amongst them) have generally found it expedient to ‘let her’ have her own way. I rather think your brother will make the same discovery, if he has not already. But she is a dear, true-hearted, generous-souled little woman, too; and, if she can, will be a peace-maker between your brother and you.”

The Lieutenant shook his head dejectedly, as if he thought *that* beyond her.

But a sudden storm of rain whipped the window of the little parlour, and startled them. It had rather suddenly grown dusk, and the weather out of doors looked wild. The prospect of those four or five miles of solitary plodding between Ashton and Seabay was not agreeable.

“There will be a moon, later,” said he, encouraging himself; “and the storm will probably abate when she rises.”

But the Lieutenant would not hear of his quitting shelter that night.

There was the closet with the bed in it, which he had occupied several times before. It would be got ready for him in ten minutes. Mrs. Ashton was never anxious at his non-appearance when she knew he had gone to Mudditon.

Ashton did not require much persuasion to remain, where he felt so content and so welcome.

They sat up talking till near midnight, and then separated to turn in. Mrs. Hartley had not re-appeared all the evening.

CHAPTER XVI

UNHAPPY ROBERT HARTLEY !

Now this corner house was the last in Mudditon, on that side. Ashton's little closet of a bed-room was just inside the parlour and looked sideways at the sea. Immediately below and before the window was a wide, flat space of shingly beach, terminated by the western arm of the cliffs that enclosed Mudditon, except on the south. The Lieutenant's bed-room in this odd little house was on the ground-floor, on one side of the entrance, and only got at through the kitchen ; unless, indeed, you climbed into the window, which was underneath Ashton's, though not exactly, for nothing in this remarkable architecture was regular and ordinary. There was no other bed-room, and the servant girl did not sleep in the house.

Something made Ashton wakeful for a good while ; and he was only half-asleep when a slight noise roused him again. He then fancied he heard a low tapping, and a window lifted. He was so thoroughly disturbed, that he got up, and, drawing aside the blind, looked out. The rain had quite ceased, and the wind came in long gusts, that died away into a dead stillness, except for that hollow sound of the breaking sea, so incessant and

monotonous as to be almost unnoticed. The moon, in her third quarter, seemed to hurry and struggle through a hindering multitude of black clouds, congregated all over the plain of heaven. But near objects were visible enough by her troubled light, and Ashton distinctly saw the figure of a man, in a rough coat and tarpaulin hat, standing beside the window of the bed-room underneath, which was about breast-high from the ground.

At first Ashton thought one of the men from the station-house had come to call up his officer, on some sudden night-alarm.

But then he saw a woman's hand and arm, looking spectrally white in the moonshine, thrust out from the window below ; the forefinger pointed with an energetic, imperious, reiterated gesture towards the dark boundary-wall of cliffs, looming against the half-lighted sky. After that, the window was gently closed. The man stood still for a moment, then turned, and walking rapidly forward, his form was soon drowned in the deep night shadows. Very quickly the house door was softly opened and shut, and then Ashton beheld Ellen Hartley flying across that white space of shingle, speedily to be lost in the same gloom.

Ashton stood and stared into it after her in a sorrowful and painful perplexity.

Unhappy Robert Hartley ! Was there no true household heart for him, then ? Mother and wife both ! Cruellest deserters ! unnatural traitors ! Was the terrible menace of the text that haunted him indeed to be verified on his hearth ?

Then Ashton had a hard question to discuss with his conscience. Must he tell the Lieutenant what he had seen ? Must it be his duty thus entirely to darken poor Hartley's existence, blotting out that speck of vivid colour which yet lingered among its sunk and faded hues ? The question was presently settled, without his volition, by a very simple accident.

This time it was really a coast-guardsman who came up and tapped sharply at the Lieutenant's window. It

was the way in which he was generally summoned on nocturnal occasions. There was no reply from within; the weary Lieutenant slept profoundly; and the man rapped again, and this time effectually. The Lieutenant replied to the call, and in a couple of minutes was outside the house. He found, however, that the man had only come for certain directions, which he gave, and dismissed him.

In his haste he had not yet observed his wife's absence, nor that he had found the entrance door unlocked. But now, when he returned to his room and did not find his wife there, he suddenly remembered that she, always the first to awake at the least sound or movement, had made no sign even while he stumbled about the room, putting on his clothes in the dark. Then she could not have been there—and on the heels of that conviction trod the remembrance of the unlocked house door.

He stood still: perplexed, bewildered, alarmed, but utterly unsuspecting of evil doing. Not for one moment did it occur to him to doubt his wife's loyalty. Pure terror for her safety made his voice husky, as he shouted up to Ashton from the foot of the stairs.

His guest ran down instantly, for he had dressed himself as soon as he perceived that a discovery was imminent.

"Ashton!" cried Hartley, "my wife's not in the house! For God's sake help me to find her! She complained of her head—she looked so strange last night. If she should have gone out for air—wandering about in that unfit state—God grant—"

The poor Lieutenant's words were choked by agitation.

They had left the house, and hurrying through the garden wicket, ran up to the beach.

"You go that way," said Hartley, "I'll try this."

And he was darting right into the jaws of that shadowy distance which yet withheld so dire a secret.

Ashton caught his arm.

"My dear Hartley—" cried he, hardly knowing what he did, any more than what he ought to do.

The night was, as I said, but dimly lit by the cloud-hindered moon. Along the beach, as far as Ashton could see on either hand, no smaller objects were visible to him than the station-house, flagstaff, and boats. But the sailor's practised eye was quicker.

"There she is!" he exclaimed, catching sight, perhaps, of some windy flutter of a shawl; and, breaking from Ashton, ran towards the western cliffs.

Ashton ran with him, shoulder to shoulder. The Lieutenant was right, she was there. Hartley caught his wife by the hand, and drew it hastily under his arm. He hardly noticed her companion, probably taking him for some fisherman chance-met on the beach.

"Oh! my dear," said he affectionately, "come in, come in. What a fright you have given me!"

"Let her be, let her be!" interrupted a rough, furious voice behind him. "Don't you touch of my lass afore my eyes,—now I warn you both. Let her be, I say."

Robert Hartley turned sharply round on the speaker, as if wrenched, and ghastly grew his face fronting that of Ellen's companion; but horror seemed to have struck him speechless. There was light enough to see each other plainly, at arm's length, as they were, and the man stood and eyed him savagely.

He himself was a little, broad-shouldered fellow, of an ugly and vulgar type; and there was a vicious fury in his look, and in his snarl, like that of a dog. He was either half-drunk, or half-mad with some intense emotion.

The Lieutenant had dropped Ellen's hand, as he turned round, and now remained perfectly still, slightly bending forward, and his face in the white light had a corpse-like defeaurement.

"Yes it be I," said the man, brutally; "so now just you go about your business, and I'll go about mine. Only this my lass goes with *me*, *this* time."

He made a step forward and put out his arm towards Ellen; she slipped out of his reach, then came in front of Robert, and, looking up in his ghastly face, took one of his hands.

"Leave go," growled the stranger, striking their fingers asunder; "I won't have it!"

Ellen looked round at him, over her shoulder.

"You promised not to harm him," said she, "if I would go away with you."

"No more I won't; but I'll harm *thee*, lass! By God, I'll have thy life, if you touch one another again afore me! By God, I will! Come along then; I don't want to hurt thee—I like thee too well. Come away, Nelly lass; I'll forgive and forget, and be as kind to thee as ever I can—but come away straight this minute, and don't tempt me no more."

She stood irresolute, then went up to Ashton, and said, in a rapid, convulsive way:

"It is my husband. I told Robert he was dead. He wants me back—he says he'll kill Robert if I don't go with him. Take care of Robert."

She saw Ashton put his hand on Robert Hartley's arm.

"Now," said she to her husband, "I'll go."

But the unfortunate Lieutenant, with a strong pang, seemed to wake from his stupor.

"Ellen," said he gently, as he always addressed her, "I must hear the truth now, you know. You must tell me the whole truth now. Come into the house and bring your—bring Datchet with you. I must hear the truth now—the truth, the truth! Come, Ashton, come."

And so muttering, as if bewildered, he went back to the corner house, leaning heavily on his friend. The man and woman followed: she told him to come, and he came; appearing pacified, almost docile, since she had submitted to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PISTOL-SHOT.

THE Lieutenant and Ashton entered first, and walked into the little kitchen, where a light had been left burn-

ing. Datchet and Ellen came close behind. He pulled off his tarpaulin hat, wiped his forehead, and sat down. He looked about forty years old, and there was more expression in his ugly features than Ashton had discovered by the cloudy moonlight. The moment his red, fierce dog's eye rested on Ellen it grew human and softened, and his eye was continually seeking her. She never looked at him, nor away from Hartley. It was a strange scene, of which Ashton was the deeply interested spectator. Nobody sat down but Datchet. Robert Hartley stood by the deal table, and was the first to speak, which he did abruptly. "Now tell me the truth, Ellen."

She came and stood by the table also, opposite to him, resting her fingers on it, and looking down. Intense emotion seemed to obliterate the impress and superscription of refinement, as heat fuses a coin: she spoke like the girl of the people that she had been.

"I'll tell you the truth, Robert. This fellow, yes, he's my husband—he murdered a chap in a public at Stonehouse. That was five years ago. He was drunk when he did it—he was pretty well always drunk, you know. He was obliged to leave the country: I helped him to: he had got no money nor brains left to help himself. He came crawling to me to get him off: he didn't send his fist at me *then*. No! I said, very well, I'd save him if he would swear on the Testaments to leave me for good and all, from that day forth for ever more, amen. And he swore ready enough, the frightened cowardly cur! But now here he is after me again."

Up to this time she had kept her head quite still, looking down fixedly on the table, scorn and recklessness expressed by her lips, and even by her half-closed lids. But now she suddenly lifted her full grey eyes, glistening with a lovely tenderness that changed her into something angelic.

"I told you he was dead, and you believed me easy, bless you! And I let you see then that I liked you. I wished for you to marry me, Robert, because I knew there was no one else—and you wanted some one—and I

knew I could promise in church to be a good wife to *you*—I could love and honour and obey *you*, and serve you faithful and fond, Robert, all the days of my life.”

She lost her voice here, and they heard a slight hysterical sob, but she presently struggled on.

“So that’s all the truth, dear. This fellow has come back and found me out, and I’ve been keeping of him off you these four days. I thought I’d a hold on him about that Stonehouse business, but he says he don’t mind—hang or not hang, he’ll part *us*. So what’s the use? Just say you’ll forgive me that one lie, Robert! And—I’ve been your wife this four years, haven’t I? But never was his—no, nor fifty parsons couldn’t make me. And—and I haven’t been a bad wife to you, have I, dear? And you’ve—you’ve been the best, best, best—And now, I—oh, I wish I was dead! I wish I was dead!”

She flung herself on her knees, threw her arms over the table, dropped her face on them, and broke into a storm of passionate weeping.

The man Datchet had sat and listened to all she said without attempting to interrupt her. His coarse face twitched a little, not at the contemptuous expressions she applied to himself, but at those of tenderness addressed to Hartley. On the whole, however, it betrayed little except a brutal sort of admiration and fondness.

When she at last yielded to that torrent of grief, he waited a few moments, and then, getting up, struck her smartly on the shoulder.

“Come,” said he, “that’s about enough, Nelly. Thee’ve said thy say, my woman; now it’s my turn. Look’ee here. I left thee ’cause life was sweet, even to I; and I *was* skeared at the gallows, that’s true. I’ve tried to keep away, but I got mad thinking of thee, though I didn’t know of thy pranks neither. When I did know, I got madder. For, look’ee here, though I thrashed thee I loved thee, my way, and could ’a hugged thee same time. Sounds laughable, don’t it? Now I’ve made up my mind to have thee back, or swing. I’ve took the risk, and I don’t think he’ll stop me, for thy sake; it’s biggy-

my agin thee, whatever comes. Long and short of it, lass, I be thy husband, whatever I be, and that there chap bain't—that's all about it. Come, look sharp; I don't want none of thy traps; I've got a precious sight more money than he to giv'ee. Now then!"

As he struck her again on the shoulder she started up, quite beside herself, and pushed him staggering away from her with both her beautiful strong arms; then she stretched them out to Robert Hartley.

"If you kill me," she said, "I'll kiss him before I go."

That wild jealousy which seemed to enter Datchet like a devil whenever he saw his wife and the Lieutenant touch each other, leaped up in him now.

"By God!" he roared out, "if thee wilt touch him, there'll be murder on this floor, my woman! I can't help myself, I tell thee!" he gasped, open-mouthed with passion.

"You promised not to hurt him if I went with you," said Ellen, suddenly confronting her husband; "are you going to cheat me again, you Liar?"

"No, I bain't, Nelly; I tell thee again thy fancy-man be safe this time. It's *thee*, lass! I shall do thee a mischief, and I don't want to!"

Ellen flung her arms round the Lieutenant, and kissed his lips.

Datchet, with a howl of pain and fury, tore her off, and held her before him with one iron arm, while he thrust his right hand into his breast. That was but a moment; the next a pistol-shot—a woman's scream, and Ellen lying on the floor, ghastly, bloody—a smile on her face.

Ashton rushed on Datchet, and collared him. The man had dropped on his knees beside his wife; he just looked stolidly up, and then stared down again at Ellen. But the moment the Lieutenant lifted her in his arms, he would have wrenched himself from Ashton, growling oaths as he bade Hartley "Let her be!"

"Do you think we shall let her die there, you rascal?"

cried Ashton, keeping his hold on him. "Here, come in, my men! Take care of this fellow."

Two or three coast-guard men having witnessed part of the scene on the beach, had loitered about the Lieutenant's unlocked door; they had opened it without ceremony at the sound of the pistol-shot, leaving it open, and crowded into the little entry. A chill whiff of day-break air blew in, and revived the fainting woman; a mingled moan of wind and wave came with it; and outside, beyond the lighted kitchen and the dark entry, glimmered a back-ground of heaving, ashy waters and troubled sky.

The men easily secured Datchet; he made no resistance, but glared ferociously, showing his teeth like a dog, at the Lieutenant, who, with Ashton, was examining Ellen's hurt.

She was shot through the shoulder, and was not mortally, perhaps not even dangerously, wounded. The only tenderness Datchet ever knew was a master-passion that had convulsed him, and must have unsteadied his hand, since, at hardly its own breadth, his shot had not been fatal.

There was no surgeon nearer than Seabay, and Ashton was ready to start thither without delay. Meanwhile the Lieutenant, assisted by the servant and a woman or two from the village, hastily summoned, would do all that was possible for the sufferer.

Datchet was placed in the custody of the coast-guard men, to be kept at the station-house till the morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PHILOSOPHY AND PIGSTICKING.

ASHTON might have had no better conveyance to Seabay at that hour than his own feet—no vehicle being pro-

curable, or even a horse in the village. But luckily a boat was just starting from Mudditon to a station on the further side of Seabay. He ran down the beach and jumped in, just as the boat was pushed off.

It was near dawn, and the weather was now beautifully clear. Driven by a freshening, steady wind, all the black thronging clouds were galloping away like a herd of elephants, as Keats says. The shapeless moon hung pure and awful in the sky—there is something awful to me in the look of the moon in her third quarter. They were old men-of-war's men that rowed, and they pulled even, swift, and strong, as perhaps only men-of-war's men do.

Ashton was infinitely comforted by the racy breeze that blew on his face, smelling of morning and the sea. He began now to realize the strange and painful scenes he had just witnessed, and, according to his habit of thought, fetched a meaning out of them, and made his mental commentary. It was his instinct to philosophise about things; but he did it in a large-hearted way, as is not often the case with your *soi-disant* philosophers. He saw more clearly than ever the miserably evil and dangerous condition of our women in what we superciliously call our lower classes. *For the men of their order are not their equals.* He had often made this reflection when in city-street or country-road he had heard the clear, rapid speech and intellectual intonation of a woman, answered by the brutal grunt of the human hog at her side. The male British savage requires much painstaking to civilize him in the least, while the female is hardly ever naturally brutal.

"I'm afraid," quoth Ashton to himself, "an Englishman in the raw is but a beast—sensual, immodest, selfish, blasphemous, brutal, and given to liquor.

"Now, as long as these men are allowed to remain in this barbarous condition of swinish degradation, so long will the women apportioned to them by 'class' be exposed to the strong temptation of associating with gentlemen. Yea, although to their own ruin, although called

on in yielding to pay the price of a life and death of shame.

"And perhaps the only reason that this defection from the men of their own class does not go much farther, lies in the known fact, that many 'gentlemen' treat these weaklings, once in their power, quite as brutally as their own men do. But when a gentleman is found whose manners are courteous, whose language is unexceptionable with the poorest as that which he would hold in a drawing-room, whose conversation is intelligent, kindly, and not immoral, how is a woman of superior organization—already shocked and revolted by the coarseness of the men she is thrown among, now first finding that the world contains Ferdinands as well as Calibans—how is she to resist the attraction of that man's society? She flies to it as a kindred thing, a refuge, and almost as naturally as water rises to its level. There is a shout of blame on all sides; she knows it is an intercourse forbidden, discountenanced, fatal; disgrace and ruin are to be her portion (not his—no, hers alone!) if she yields; yet the fitness of things is more potent than all.

"And here," pursued Ashton, deep in thought—"here was a young married woman of this 'lower class,' who had taken but one disastrous peep into the stony desert of the world. She found herself in the hands of a husband who was a mere brute—not even her slave, only the slave of his own selfish passions. Naturally she laughed at and despised him—she being a woman constituted to yield to nothing not superior, of a haughty, rebellious character, but of great intelligence and nicety, and capable of gratitude and of the most feminine tenderness. How was it possible for her to live with a stupid, drunken, tyrannical lout like that? How she must have beat her breast and wings against the bars of that frightful marriage-cage! No hope for her, no innocent enjoyment any more, no outlet but death or shame! And all because, ignorantly, as girls of her grade do, she, almost a child, married a man in her

own 'class,' who took her perhaps out of a breadless home, and promised to be kind to her!"

Just about this time Ashton found himself galloping at racing pace through some paddy fields, spear in hand, after a black pig. He launched his weapon, and missed—round wheeled piggy, justly offended, and charged. Out came Ashton's pistol—piggy leaped at pony—off went pistol, down came pony, piggy, and pigsticker, rolling over and over, and down, down, down a perpendicular red cliff. But when they reached the bottom, piggy was Ellen, covered with blood, lying under a palm tree on Mudditon beach, close by the station-house. She was rather dimly visible, however, through a cloud of smoke from the Lieutenant's pipe; Ashton himself was engaged in lighting a candle, which, to his intense indignation, Datchet immediately blew out, saying—

"Sorry to disturb you, sir."

"You rascal!" cried Ashton, and opened his eyes.

It was broad daylight, and the boat was on Seabay beach.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," said one of the preventive service men, smiling, and touching his queer hat.

Ashton, half asleep, took them in their shaggy coats for benevolent bears, as they helped the sleepy gentleman to tumble out. In another moment the white boat was dancing on the water; and in five minutes, Ashton, still standing half bewildered on the pebbly sea-marge, distinguished it in the silvery bay chiefly by a distant sparkle of the oars as they dipped in the eye of sunrise.

Ashton had consulted Hartley as to the surgeon he should send, and they both agreed that Dr. Tottle, with whom they were both a little acquainted, should be the man.

Dr. Tottle was a retired army-surgeon, with some reputation for skill—beloved, respected, and irresistibly laughed at, for his kindness, worth, and oddity. His oddity was partly owing to a nervous affection, which

caused the most astounding contortions, jerks, and eccentric behaviour, and which had itself been produced by a frightful domestic catastrophe. He was said to have awakened from a sound sleep one morning, and to have found his wife lying by his side with her throat cut from ear to ear, both wallowing in a hideous pool of blood. She had destroyed herself in a sudden fit of insanity.

It was at this time that Dr. Tottle had come to Seabay, all alone, in a wretched state of mind and body. He bought and furnished a small house on a terrace there, with a small back garden, with a small greenhouse against the wall of it; and he added to his possessions a piano and a pony. By degrees he recovered in some measure his health and spirits.

People were kind to him, and they could, among them, give him a little good music—a food his soul loved. He was an affectionate, sensitive man; his bright black eyes would be suffused with tears at a beggar's story, or a simple strain of music. He had occupied himself by harmonizing the discordant elements of the church choir, and had really done wonders with the scrannel pipes of the Sunday-school children who chiefly composed it.

He gave medical or surgical advice gratis to all who wished for it, and the poor of Seabay never asked in vain for that or anything else he had to bestow on them.

Ashton stood at his door, at four o'clock, on a July morning, and discreetly pulled the knob marked "night bell." This metallic summons tinkled close to Dr. Tottle's nightcap, as he comfortably snoozed in his iron bedstead, on a mattress that might have been iron, too, for the sternness of its temper. He instantly jumped up, went to his ever-open window, which was just over his front door, and dropped something out.

"Law bless me, though!" said he to himself, when he had done it, "it's daylight!"

Then he dressed himself with much precipitancy.

Meanwhile, Ashton, who was casting his eyes upwards

over Dr. Tottle's modest frontage, suddenly found his head and face enveloped in a clean and solid huckaback towel, which appeared to have descended on him mantle-wise from heaven.

Now, Nos. 3, 4, and 5, on Talavera Terrace, composed a sandwich of Tottle between two timid maiden ladies, one of whom was a real invalid, and the other an imaginary one. Not for worlds would the tender-hearted doctor have broken the repose of these suffering virgins, by exchanging a word from his window with persons who summoned him at abnormal hours. He dropped a towel on the doorstep, which said, "All right, I'm coming," with the utmost distinctness, as he flattered himself; and he was extremely delighted with his ingenious manœuvre. He now opened his house door, and recognized Ashton, who had happily disembarrassed himself of his drapery. "Law bless you!" cried the doctor, "that's *not* you, Mr. Ashton?"

In a paroxysm of astonishment he caught up his left foot with his left hand, and hopping about on his right leg, darted at Ashton's forefinger, which he seized as if to sustain himself, and hung to.

"I am come—" began Ashton.

"Law bless you, yes! Come in, come in," said Dr. Tottle, letting down his leg, and throwing open the door of his little dining-room. When he had folded back the shutters, and Ashton had got him seated in a chair *en face*, he listened with the deepest attention to what his visitor had to relate.

At first he sat stooping somewhat, rocking his head backwards and forwards, and lifting his hands up and down, very much after the manner of certain queer porcelain figures with which we are familiar.

But all of a sudden he checked his hand and changed his style. He sat bolt upright, and firm as a rock, only now and then viciously twitching up his right trouser-leg, with an accompanying twitch of his nose. By the time he had heard the story out, and done twitching up his drapery, half a little sockless yellow leg,

terminating in a scarlet morocco slipper, was airing itself in the morning sunshine.

"Law bless him, yes! I'll get on my pony and be off directly. Yes. Will you have some breakfast?"

Ashton declined; said he was going to Myrtle Cottage, in a few hours he should be at Mudditon again, and perhaps might find the doctor still there.

"But first I am going to walk straight into the sea," said Ashton; and, with your permission, will take advantage of this opportune loan of yours."

"Ah-haha! Yes," replied the doctor, eyeing his huckaback complacently, and taking an imaginary pinch of snuff.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE "TOXETER GAZETTE" AGAIN.

ON the 28th July, about two o'clock P.M., Colonel Danhaye suddenly appeared in Mr. Nettlefold's dining-room in Portland Place. The senator, his brother-in-law, was majestically eating cold lamb in the bosom (poetically speaking) of Mrs. and Miss Nettlefold, when this visitor burst upon them.

"Howdy-do? Howdy-do? Have you seen it, Letitia? No, you can't; not in the London papers yet. Look there! that thingamee scored with ink."

Mrs. Nettlefold, who was used to the elderly warrior's impetuosity, calmly took up the *Toxeter Gazette*, which he skimmed along the table into her plate, and read aloud, in a distinct voice, the following paragraph:

"Married, at Seabay, on the 26th instant, by the Reverend James Lipley, Rector, Grinston Hartley, Esq., of Hartley Hall and Cony's Court, in this county, to Louisa Laura, relict of the late Major Ashton of the —th Foot, and only daughter and heiress of Colonel Danhaye, of Danhaye Park, Kent."

Mrs. Nettlefold let fall the paper, got up, and laid her well-shaped hand on her brother's arm.

"My poor Philip," said she affectionately, "be calm!"

"It is a curious coincidence—" mouthed Mr. Nettlefold, but the Colonel ruthlessly broke in:

"*And heiress!*" ejaculated he. "That's good, isn't it? — *and heiress!* Damn her impudence, — haugh, haugh—beg your pardon. Now, if she hadn't put in that, I'd—I think I'd have sent her a—a banknote, just to buy flounces. For she seems to have married decently this time—hey?"

Decency means money with a great number of persons besides Colonel Danhaye. Not long ago I met, after a lapse of years, a fashionable mother of my acquaintance, and inquired for her youngest daughter. She immediately shuddered, shut her eyes, hung her head (as if oppressed by family disgrace), sadly shook it, and heaving a sigh that seemed to rend her maternal heart, murmured, "Unhappy girl! Don't, *don't* ask."

"Oh, dear," thought I, sincerely sorry, "Jane has eloped with some foreign Count, or married that wicked old Sir Wizeny Scumb, for his money."

"She is utterly, *utterly* lost!" continued the distressed mother (though I *didn't* ask). "And with her beauty! and her voice! educated as she was! She who might have been Lady Scumb at this moment. Not to have married even *decently!*"

In fact, Jane had married indecently, for love, a very worthy young Civil Engineer, and resided with him near the New Road. It sounds very shocking, but I found her in her little house next day, looking shamelessly happy; and in a corner of the sofa there was something under a shawl she begged me not to sit upon, and called Baby. She solemnly affirmed to me, when I put it to her conscience, that she was a thousand times happier than she had ever been in Belgravia; and incredible as it sounded, I could not help believing her.

"Poor Louisa!" sighed Mrs. Nettlefold, "I fear she

discovered the difference between the too indulgent parent who gratified her most costly whims, and a brother-in-law who, probably, grudged her the bread she ate."

"Bread?" said the Colonel; "well, she had got *that*, I suppose, of her own."

"But Louisa likes her bread buttered," rejoined Mrs. Nettlefold, with sweet pleasantry. "As you know, my dear Philip, her tastes are by no means inexpensive. Dress and show are not to her the indifferent matters they appear to those whose hearts are set on things above."

And the pious woman counted six wasps on the ceiling.

"To be sure. Yes. That's very true, Letitia," acquiesced the Colonel, solemnly. "Well, I should think this brother-in-law must have been glad to get her off his hands. Can't have more money than he knows what to do with. Must have set her off to get her off—hey?"

"It is a curious coincidence—" Mr. Nettlefold was here heard to recommence; but again the Colonel rushed against and floored him.

"How well I remember that fellow, Montague Ashton, to be sure! I remember his going off to India twelve or fourteen years ago—one of the sucking judges out of Haileybury. And when Willy Ashton was running tame about my house (before the smash, you know), he was for ever bothering about his pig-sticking brother, "the sahib," as he called him; reading out bits of his letters, and showing us his sporting sketches; boring about the boars—hey!"

Mrs. Nettlefold smiled indulgently, and then observed, "Who could have sent you this paper?"

"Who? Why, who but Louy? Just like her. 'I'll astonish papa,' thought she. 'I'll show him I can do without him!'"—And if she hadn't put in that damned thing—(ah! haugh! haugh!—excuse my coarseness)—if she, or they, had left out that piece of impudence, I might have

found it in my heart to do something for her, now she has got herself into a respectable position. I hate your needy, pinching and screwing folks; but Hartley of Hartley Hall sounds all right, hey? I feel inclined to say 'Well done, Louy!'—upon my word, I do."

"It is really a curious coincidence," persevered Mr. Nettlefold, "that my late sister's husband, the Reverend Peter Drewe——"

But here his own wife pitilessly tore from him his little hoarded treasure.

"Mr. Nettlefold's brother-in-law is vicar of Hartley-bridge, the parish in which Hartley Hall is situated. It is a family living of the Hartleys," said Mrs. Nettlefold.

"You don't say so! Then he knows all about this new husband of Louy's? But bless me, Letitia! you must have known all about it, too—and never said a word—how's that?"

"My dear Philip, we have little, next to no correspondence with these people, the Drewes. We do not exchange letters once a-year, hardly."

Which was as untrue as a good deal that this pious woman had said in the course of her painstaking life. She had corresponded very regularly indeed with the Reverend Peter Drewe, for some time past—ever since she had ascertained her niece's vicinity to him, at Seabay; and had heard of the marriage quite as soon as it was finally arranged. She had anticipated her brother's gratification at Louisa's good match, and that it would give her an excellent chance of recovering the good opinion of her papa. She had particular reasons—doubtless righteous ones, being so righteous a lady—for regarding this contingency with an unfavourable eye; and though not very hopeful of the best results, had thought it worth while to suggest the offensive addition to that marriage proclamation in the *Toxeter Gazette*, which she rightly believed the Reverend Peter would undertake the insertion of. He might represent it as a mistake, or as an effective hit, according as the humour of Mr. Hartley required. Mrs. Nettlefold had a certain forcible but

agreeable way of putting this suggestion, which she knew would prove irresistible to her correspondent. She likewise desired him to forward the *Toxeter Gazette* to the Colonel at the earliest moment. She knew that that paragraph, with its insolent assumption, would re-appear in all the London papers, seeming to emanate from Louisa, or at least to be sanctioned by her, and must put a spoke in the wheel that seemed rolling towards reconciliation.

There had been, as we know, a moment when the Colonel had felt a fatherly yearning towards his offending child, even when she wanted him. There had been, in fact, many such moments. He loved her as well as he could, and perhaps better than he knew—certainly more than she guessed. He had caught a glimpse of her in her weeds one day, when she came (on her friend the regimental Colonel's arm) to his door in Park Lane. His servants had received orders to deny him to her, and she went away. She did not see her father, but he was peeping behind his study blind at his girl's poor little crape-hung face, in its frame of crimped muslin, all the time she stood on his steps. He let her go and swore at her between his teeth—with the tears running down his face from his faded old eyes. From that day Mrs. Nettlefold had taken good care there should be no more glimpses so disturbing to his resolution and equanimity, and so dangerous to her particular private views in this matter.

When Louisa left London, and went to live at Seabay, under her brother-in-law's protection, she wrote to her father the following letter, which he both opened and read :

“DEAR PAPA,

“My dearest husband's brother is come from India. He is very kind to me, and will do all he can to comfort me in my sore need and loneliness. I think it right to let you know that my child and I are not left without the pity and protection my *nearest relations* have denied me, and that I shall not be quite the *poor outcast*

they imagined. I shall never trouble you with any more letters, papa; but I shall still (as I am bound) pray for your health and prosperity; and I remain your affectionate daughter

“L. L. ASHTON.”

This was rather a pert, undutiful letter; but the Colonel was secretly pleased with it. In the first place, “Louy’s spirit” had always amused and suited him better than a meeker behaviour would have done; and he was really not sorry to find that she would be more happy and comfortable than his renunciation might have left her.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVEREND GEORGE HALLET.

THE morning after the catastrophe in the Lieutenant’s corner house, it was found that Datchet had made his escape. One of the Preventive Service men was suspected of aiding him; but nothing more could be proved than that this man had known Datchet formerly, having worked with him in a dock-yard when both were lads. At all events, Datchet had once more slipped from the hold of justice, and would probably take care not to tempt his luck again by revisiting his native shores.

Ashton did not go to London on his sister-in-law’s wedding-day, as he had intended. He was not the man to forsake his friend in the clutch of calamity; and while the Lieutenant took up his abode in the station-house, he got himself a bed at another little tenement of the Row. The corner house was abandoned to Ellen and her nurses. She was soon pronounced out of danger as to her wound, and appeared well enough to be removed. But whither? What was to become of her? Her mind was in so miserable a state as very much to retard her recovery. Dr. Tottle undertook to lodge her com-

fortably in a farm-house at Seabay, where he would visit her frequently, and take care she was well treated; and this necessary removal from Hartley's house and immediate neighbourhood was effected with the utmost consideration and kindness.

Ashton was at last obliged to go to London, where he had business that would admit of no further delay. He left his unfortunate friend, the Lieutenant, going about his duties calmly and patiently enough, however desolate and comfortless at heart. As for Ellen, she would want nothing for the present, at all events, for Ashton had begged Dr. Tottle to take care that she had all she needed, without fear of draining the Lieutenant's little purse.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ashton's marriage had taken place on the appointed day. She had been very much shocked at the tragic event at Mudditon, though it was not to be expected that she should fail to remind Ashton of her astute doubts respecting the Lieutenant's beautiful wife. But she was too busy, or too merciful, to push her triumph beyond the inevitable "I told you so,"—and she then expressed her wish to delay the marriage until poor Robert Hartley should be in a less disastrous plight. But Ashton represented that this could neither be requisite nor desirable, considering the total cessation of all intercourse between the brothers. And Louisa, being sincerely bent on producing a better state of things when she should find herself entitled, as wife and sister, to interfere, was reasonable enough to see the folly of first widening the breach by adding this additional vexation of delay on Robert's account.

So the marriage took place on the 26th, and the blissful pair went to Rhineland.

One day, early in the following October, Ashton was sitting in the coffee-room of his London hotel, writing to Mrs. Hartley, of Hartley Hall. He told her he should now be free from business engagements in two days, and would then start to pay his promised visit to her and Mr. Hartley.

When he had finished his letter he proceeded to seal it, and then for the first time cast his eyes round the room, which had several other occupants. Some read the papers, some wrote—making an unmelodious concert of scratching pens and crackling broadsheets.

There was a good-looking, white neckclothed gentleman in black, with frizzly dark hair, and a very capacious forehead, sitting by two scagliola pillars with a red screen between them, whose face seemed perfectly familiar to Ashton, though for a few moments his identity baffled memory. The type was rather Jewish, but without the sensual retreating chin which often disfigures that physiognomy. At last some one came in, nodded to this individual, and wished him good morning by name. Ashton's perplexity was instantaneously relieved, and he went up with outstretched hand.

"Hallet!" said he smiling, "well met—old friend, must I tell you my name?"

"Montague Ashton!" cried the other; "who'd have thought it!"

And the English hand-clasp expressed a great deal that was inaudible.

And then came ten minutes of eager and sad talk.

He was the son of a captain in the Navy, who had a cottage in the village close to Ashton's old home in Kent. He had been the schoolfellow of William and Montague, and was going to Cambridge when the latter went to India from Hayleybury. With William some correspondence had been kept up, but of late years the schoolfellows had quite lost sight of each other in the press of life.

"And you're a regular hard-working parson?" said Ashton.

"Yes, only I've got no regular parson's work. I lost my curacy four or five years ago, because the man came back and did his own business; and quite right too, of course. There wasn't enough for two. So, since that, I am by way of preparing young men for college, when I

can catch any; and I also prepare articles for all the unmanusing periodicals—sober, steady-going things; I'm 'rather just than brilliant,' the critics say. Well, these preparations, of one kind and another, keep me in mutton chops and white ties, and what more *can* a clergyman want? 'I miserable!' said the Greenland chief, 'not a bit; haven't I as much train-oil as I can drink, and a fish-bone through my nose?'—the necessary and the beautiful, eh?"

Ashton suspected his old schoolfellow was far from a prosperous or happy man, in spite of his cheerful manners and his dutiful wish to be contented with his lot.

He owned that his health was not good, and that he was ordered to seek a warmer climate for the winter, either abroad or in the west of England.

"But my only chance is to find some rich lad who will come with me and pay the piper," said he; "and I am going to a scholastic agency office this afternoon to look for one. Why, it's half-past two now, I declare! I ought to be there. Good-bye, Montague. Will you come up to my place this evening and smoke a vulgar clay? Here's my address."

And he was off with all the vehement celerity of movement which brought George Hallet back to Ashton far more familiarly than did that prim little card printed in Old English characters, of the

"Reverend George Hallet, M.A., Doughty Street, Mecklenburgh Square."

In the evening Ashton went to his lodging, and found him writing with all his might, at a great table that nearly filled up his little parlour, and was strewn with half-sheets of manuscript. He collected them all at one swoop, seized Montague by the shoulders, pushed him into a corner of the horse-hair sofa ("I know it's the most uncomfortable seat in Europe," said he), and presented him with a clean pipe.

"But I have brought you a bundle of capital cheroots," said his visitor, producing them.

"Vain lord of luxury and ease!" cried Hallet, "whose soul would sicken o'er the honest clay! Well, I never have no pleasure now, and a good cheroot is a rare treat. Salaam, Sabib. But what do you think? I've caught a young man: such a nice, rich young man! His mamma (she's a widow noblewoman) is to give me ever so much a year till he's ready to go to Trinity. Isn't it jolly? In consequence of which smiling prospects, my dear Mrs. Dicksie, I propose that you put in an extra spoonful, regardless of expense."

His landlady, a tall, personable, dignified body, was making tea; having completed which operation, she gracefully retreated, smiling benignantly, and daintily holding the kettle away from her puce silken skirts.

When the door was well shut on her, "Excellent creature!" exclaimed Hallet. "She causes me to consume chops for six; she puts water into my poor little beer; she reads my letters; she listens at the door—I dare say she is there now; but I love her! She has her weaknesses, but she doesn't bother."

It appeared that he had the choice of any place in England he preferred to reside at with his pupil.

Ashton suggested Seabay, as satisfactorily slow and steady. "And it's a kind little nook," said he; "and I can set you up in ready-made good-natured acquaintances there."

Hallet seemed to favour the idea.

Then they had a world of talk, sitting in a world of smoke, till they heard the chimes at midnight. And then Ashton walked briskly through the sharp night air to his hotel.

Hallet's last words were, "*Au revoir!*" for he had galloped at his usual pace over the debatable land of *pros* and *cons*, and had arrived at the determination to start for Seabay in a week's time, with his rich young man.

CHAPTER XXI

HARTLEY HALL.

ASHTON went to Seabay and Mudditon before he proceeded to Hartley Hall. He found Dr. Tottle busy in his greenhouse. When he asked for Ellen, the little man's features twitched themselves into all sorts of crooked shapes, and staring very hard at Ashton with one bright black eye, the other being tight shut, he said—

“Law bless you! she hasn't a quarter of a lung left.”

She was in a galloping consumption, and could not live a month, he thought. Evidently there had been latent disease, and her recent sufferings, still more of mind than body, had developed it with frightful rapidity.

“Does Hartley know it?” said Ashton.

“Bless you, yes. I told him myself. Why should he be humbugged? Had too much of that.”

The Lieutenant was quiet and patient, as usual. He hardly ever now yielded to a naturally violent temper, which he had disciplined with more stern will than seemed to exist in his impulsive and sweet nature.

Ashton promised to visit him more than once while he still remained in the country, and then set off to Hartley Hall. The family seat has been sketched, and Ashton, who had only seen it once before, admired Louisa's new home very heartily, under a bright sun and frosty blue sky, in its setting of autumnal gold. One long low wing was all mantled in the ruddy Virginian creeper; there was a gorgeous blaze of dahlias in the gardens, and the whole scene looked aflame with sunshine and colour. He came up to the venerable stone porch, far older than the rest of the house, and covered with ivy and late roses—just as the luncheon gong sounded; and met Louisa crossing the inner hall to the dining-room, little Helen trotting by her. She looked very pretty, she was charmingly dressed—she made as dainty a bride

as widow. She was delighted to see Ashton; as for Helen, she began to cry and sob—the sensitive little thing could never be very glad or sorry without these bursts of tears. Ashton was grieved to see this excessive sensibility, for he knew it was not the effervescence of a light and poor nature, but the irrepressible nervous vitality of a strong one. He carried her into the dining-room, where she soon became quiet, seated on his knee; and presently ate her dinner merrily between him and her mamma.

Mr. Hartley was not in the house when Ashton arrived, but soon returned at the sound of the luncheon gong. He received Ashton with much urbanity, but the men knew very well that they disliked each other; and that all the civil smiles and amiable courtesies they bandied were but those shuttlecock fibs which polite people must toss to and fro gracefully in polite society.

"Where is your little boy?" said Ashton, civilly, though he did not like the child much, and had a bad opinion of his head.

"Edward is dining in the school-room," said his father, solemnly; "*I* don't approve of children mixing with their elders too much, Mr. Ashton. It induces familiarity, *which* induces disrespect."

Mr. Hartley dealt much in this Tupperian form of ancestral philosophy.

"And disrespect," he continued, with a terrible severity, "I never permit or pardon. My family has been sufficiently disgraced by godless profligates, whose downward career began in rebellion against constituted household authorities."

This awful speech produced a short silence. It was clear little Helen was eating her roast mutton and jam pudding at the same table with Hartley, of Hartley Hall, under protest; and in opposition to the declared sentiments of that magnate on the subject. It was clear to Ashton that little Helen was already a bone of contention between her sleek and solemn step-papa and her dear mamma. Dear mamma only laughed now, and said

lightly that she didn't like the idea of packing children out of sight, to eat like little pigs; they got slevonly ways.

"Well, Louisa," observed her lord, "perhaps a decent nursery governess might teach Miss Ashton not to eat with her fingers—unless you approve of that peculiarity in her manners."

And he looked severely at some poor little fingers that had stained themselves with raspberry syrup. Helen put down her spoon softly. The little face coloured up, the eyes, turned to mamma away from that evil eye, began to glisten.

"Never mind, old lady," said Louisa, drying the offending tips in her napkin, "fingers will wash; won't they? Run away to Tatt, and then come down to us in the garden."

Helen slipped off her chair, gave the darling mamma a passing hug of passionate love and gratitude, and vanished.

"It is *your* child, Louisa," said Mr. Hartley, with his usual originality, and shaking his tiresomely smooth head, with its two pieces of light sleek hair, always the same, in front of his ears. "But—excuse me, my love—you are ruining her by your deficient system of discipline."

"I have no system, my dear Mr. Hartley," said Louisa. "But, if you will take the trouble to observe, Helen generally obeys me at the first word. And she *never* utters a falsehood. If she were allowed to be afraid of anybody, she might come to tell stories like *other* children."

Ashton ate his luncheon and drank his wine quite silently during this trifling occurrence; but he got a glimpse of the new interior—got it, as it were, through an accidental blowing aside of the rose-coloured curtain which still hung over it.

Ashton had hitherto seen no reason to correct his first phrenological or philosophical analysis of Mrs. Louisa's character.

She had "plenty of pluck, and plenty of heart." She would never become the interesting victim of marital tyranny, and she would defend her youngling like a little lioness.

The Reverend Peter Drewe came up to dinner from his snug parsonage at the foot of the hill. He was an elaborately clerical, middle-aged individual—and really as like his patron as he could respectfully make himself; a modest black and white and grey copy of that florid original. He was shorter, paler, thinner; mild and obsequious instead of affable; and ready to talk on any subject that Mr. Hartley started. He never suggested a topic, and he had but one principle in discussing any whatever—he never contradicted Mr. Hartley; but he contradicted himself flatly without the least hesitation, and at a moment's notice, if his "principle" required it. Suppose Mr. Hartley to say, with his affable arrogance—

"Really, Drewe, with all respect for the cloth, I fear it's not exactly infallible. For my part, I am not by any means sure black *is* black, though you pronounce it to be so."

"Well now, really, Mr. Hartley, when I look again, upon my word, it does seem greyish."

"Greyish! my good sir, excuse me. I am sincerely sorry to find your sight failing you. Black *greyish*! Now, really!"

"As you say, my dear sir—my poor eyes! Why, of course, it's white! Black is white, sir—white as snow!"

And ten minutes after, white wouldn't be white, but black. I think this particular race of clerical parasites is nearly extinct—I hope so. But I have had the pain and shame of seeing a live specimen or two of the happily rare animal. At present the priestly sycophant eats his humble pie, composed of toads, with an air of dignified unconsciousness—as if it were grouse, and excellent, really. The Reverend heathen does not now usually bow down and worship his golden calf without a certain pomp in his humility.

Mr. Drewe was a widower, and had two sons, who came up after dinner. William, the elder, was, as you know, his uncle Nettlefold's heir-at-law. This was a dull, quiet lout of sixteen, who had but one idea in his thick skull, the shape of which appalled Ashton by its hopeless undevelopement; and the solitary idea which had taken root in that barren rock, was a thorough consciousness of his heirship. The poor dunce could hardly help retaining that one piece of information, with a lacquey to his father, and a fool to his mother. Ten times a day, in his own house, had he been reminded that he was not as other boys were; and at school or at home, with his brother or his comrades, he used for ever to whimper or bully to the self-same tune—

"I shall have £5,000 a-year when Uncle Nettlefold dies."

His school-fellows, for the most part, only laughed.

"You be hanged with your £5,000 a-year!" said they; "don't bother!" Though there are golden-calf worshippers of the tenderest years.

His brother did not laugh: it was no laughing matter to him. All the home-love, such as it was, went to the future Drewe-Nettlefold. He was the Golden Calf set up and worshipped on the parsonage hearth. For the rest, there was no particular harm in the lad, whose face had hardly more expression than a turnip. John Drewe, the younger son, was heir to nothing, not even his mother's contented folly, or his father's available obsequiousness. He was a fine, big, square, Saxon-looking lad of fifteen, with a broad, sweet, blue-eyed face, and a touselled mop of blond hair, disguising a noble head and forehead, from which Ashton could hardly take his eyes. He was rough and rather surly in deportment, as one accustomed to be snubbed, and growing defiant in his despair of being anything else.

The kicks and halfpence were distinctly divided, at Hartleybridge Parsonage, between the heir of Nettlefold Court and John Lackland.

These two big lads at present were receiving their education at the hands of their father, the Reverend Peter, in company with little Edward from the Hall.

CHAPTER XXII.

POOR ELLEN.

A FORTNIGHT after his arrival at Hartley Hall, Ashton rode over to Seabay again, and called on some of his old acquaintances, reserving Dr. Tottle for the last visit. He found the good little man on his doorstep, just letting himself in. Ashton's first question was for poor Ellen.

"Ugh!" said the doctor, rapidly going through the deaf and dumb alphabet on his fingers, and looking intently at his visitor, as if he were a patient thus afflicted. "She'll—she'll be out of her troubles this day week. Yes. Humph! Eh?"

And he rattled off an impossible word, ending with m, x, z, and flipped off a full stop like the crack of a dog-whip. He said her malady was hurrying her away with frightfully accelerated speed, since the autumn frosts had set in; that her mind was in as terrible a condition as her body; that she would not admit the thought of dying—not so much that she wished to live, for life's sake, but that she had a positive fear of death, such as the doctor had never before witnessed. He considered it had quite as much to do with her physical as moral constitution. But it could only be reached through her morale.

"*I can do nothing, law bless you!*" said the poor doctor, taking hold of his own nose, making a long upper lip, and slowly shaving himself with an imaginary razor, still fixedly gazing at Ashton.

"Has the Lieutenant seen her?"

"I wouldn't let him," said the doctor; "she'd be off in five minutes, bless you! I asked Mr. Lipleigh and the

curate to go and see her; but, law bless you, they're no use. Mr. Lipley didn't go, and Mr. Granville Green went and stood by her bed ten minutes, looking as if he was afraid of her—which I believe he was. Then he pulls out his prayer-book, and begins the prayer for dying folk—law bless you! she set off screaming like mad, and then coughed herself into a fainting fit. All she said was at the top of her poor thin voice, with her great wild eyes in a glare, 'I'm not dying—I'm not dying—I won't die!' Master Green was properly frightened then, I promise you. But what's to be done? Dear me, dear me, she can't be left like that! Will *you* go and see her?"

"Well," said Ashton, greatly shocked, "I will, if you think I could do her any good—but how can I hope it? Stop, stop! I see a man that can and will, if it's in a man to do it."

Ashton clapped on his hat, darting out of the room and out of the house, exactly as if he had suddenly gone mad. Before the doctor had time to perplex himself much with conjectures, however, Ashton returned with an unknown gentleman in black, whom he introduced to Dr. Tottle as Mr. Hallet, his old friend, and a clergyman.

He had been strolling along Talavera Terrace, looking about him, having arrived only the previous night, when Ashton had espied him from Dr. Tottle's window. Ashton's rarely erring estimate of character led him to see hope that his strong-headed, strong-hearted parson-friend would be the very man to obtain a hearing from a poor wild wilful creature, haughty though humbled, desperate, dying, but rebellious like unhappy Ellen Datchet. Mr. Hallet, grave in a moment, listened to all that was told him, pondered, got up, and asked the way to the Rectory.

"I must have Mr. Lipley's leave," said he, "but I hope to be with her in half-an-hour. I can find my way to the farm."

He walked off alone, and Ashton did not attempt to

follow him. But he shook hands with the doctor, and said,

“All right, doctor; if any man can show her the way, poor soul, George Hallet is he.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

PARSON'S WORK.

GEORGE HALLET found no difficulty in obtaining Mr. Lipley's permission to visit Ellen. The Rector was a pleasant, fat gentleman, whose chins increased as his days, who had no petty jealousy of the “labouring classes” in his calling, and who conceived that parish duty naturally divided itself, like a sermon, into different heads. He took the profession of “faith” for himself, and left “works” to his younger and thinner curate. “You ram down the stones, Mick, while I cry ‘ugh,’” said the Irish pavior to his mate.

Mr. Lipley appears to have adopted that idea of the division of parish labour; and plenty of us act on the same principle, whenever we can get the opportunity. It was whispered that one Seabay curate had really accepted and adopted Mr. Lipley's views; and that while Rector Faith snoozed by his study fire, and peacefully grew his chins, Curate Works trudged in the slush, and coughed himself into a consumption under a gingham umbrella. But Mr. Granville Green was not at all a young gentleman to cultivate martyrdom as Curate Works under a cotton umbrella. He had a neat little silk one, and was often met benevolently holding it over young ladies, or his own hat, caught in a shower; and his varnished boots seldom had a speck of by-way mud on them.

The Rector told Mr. Hallet that he would find a very impracticable young woman, very impracticable indeed.

He should be only too happy if Mr. Hallet's efforts were crowned with more success than those of his own excellent Curate. In such cases there was no saying—no data to go upon, you know. She might choose to listen to one person, and not to another. A sad business, a very sad business! Very distressing for Mr. Hartley of Hartley Hall—head of one of our most respected county families. Was Mr. Hallet at all acquainted with that gentleman? No. Ah! Well, he could only again assure Mr. Hallet that it would give him unfeigned pleasure, really the *most* unfeigned pleasure, to hear that he had succeeded in his charitable mission, which did him much honour—a most laudable endeavour. But——

There the Rector shut-to his mouth as if it had been a purse of gold, and he had given as much out of it as he could conscientiously afford,—and slowly shook his head. He then changed the crossing of his legs, and asked Mr. Hallet if he had seen the *Times* that morning.

From the Rectory Hallet went to the farm-house where Ellen lodged, and which was only half a mile farther down a steep lane.

Now, I am not going to enter into the details of the parson's interview with this poor dying sinful creature. This is not a religious novel; and, for my part, I confess that I know little more of a parson's holy science than of Alchemy. I must suppose that a man goes to college to learn to become a clergyman, as he must learn, by different processes, to become soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, apothecary, ploughboy, or thief. Nor can I imagine that a parson's business is easier learnt than any other. Therefore, how can I, who have never learned it, pretend to describe in what manner a priest laboured in his vocation at a death-bed? I might, with less presumption, never having studied the art of healing, undertake to tell you what combinations of drugs the doctor administered. No, I shall not dare to touch these consecrated mysteries. If they are *not* mysteries, if I could invent for this novel calming, convincing, converting, death-bed talk, fit to put

into my imaginary parson's mouth, I might, in the next place, fail to perceive the use of Oxford or Cambridge, or real clergymen, at all, and begin to think their business might be conducted with somewhat less expense to the nation, by the ladies who write the religious novels. But I do believe that a parson, here and there, has his precious secrets of a sacred skill, his sublime privileges denied to lay-folk—that there are special ministers and stewards of God's mysteries—with which I decline to meddle.

Hallet had been a vigorous worker in a country parish for several years. For several other years he laboured voluntarily, an unpaid attaché, on the staff of a London Rector, among a home population professing the purest heathenism.

So I think you may take it for granted that he knew, as well as any man could, what to say when he came to the bedside of this poor, struggling, dying, frightened sinner. At all events, he did what Ashton confidently anticipated—he got Ellen to listen to him. Her great, wild, burning eyes softened; her thin, fierce face (the beauty quite, quite gone) relaxed in every excited feature, and she cried bitterly. He succeeded in calming her purely nervous horror at the aspect of death—that was his first business there, he told her. And at last she smiled (that ghastly, latter smile of consumption), and asked him to come again. The victory was won; Ashton was right: here was the man wanted here. Ah! what sort of *chance* was it that brought about the meeting of these two old schoolfellows in the coffee-room of the London Hotel?

Ellen lived longer than Dr. Tottle anticipated. She grew quiet and sad, frequently weeping, but seldom frightened or fretful now. She quite left off the craving cry for Robert, and when asked to express any wishes she might have, said that she only desired never to see anybody more, except the doctor and the parson.

The day before her death, as Hallet sat by her, she, being in almost the last stage of physical exhaustion,

feebly put forth her wasted left hand on the coverlet, and, fixing her big wistful eyes on him, moved her lips. He did not distinctly hear, and stooped his head.

"The ring," said she, "take it off—I—I've no right."

He comprehended, and with infinite tenderness, did as she asked him. She languidly turned her face away, and wept. Then, looking round on him again, presently—

"That was proper of me, wasn't it?" said she with much simplicity. "Please give it him—by-and-bye, you know."

Next morning she died. The doctor and the parson were both with her. Hallet gently closed her eyes, and went out straight to Mudditon.

A few days after, Ashton went to London, having spent his last country hours with the solitary Lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWELVE ARCHES OF A VIADUCT.

A YEAR or two has slipped away. Let us take a look at some of our personages.

Ashton of course is in India. Mr. and Mrs. Hartley of Hartley Hall are dispensing and receiving county hospitality in a stately manner. They went to London for a short time last season, and adorned a drawing-room and a levée. Mrs. Louisa had the satisfaction of swimming past her papa in her court train and diamonds, with rather a haughty uplifting of her chin, and an absent, pre-occupied look in her lovely, half-shut eyes. In short, Mrs. Hartley of Hartley Hall publicly cut her papa, Colonel Danhaye of Danhaye Park. The fact is, she knew the worldly old gentleman only too well, in one respect, and was perfectly aware that her pardon was now to be had for the asking—or even without. She knew that it had been within reach any time since she had atoned for

marrying poor Willy by espousing, *en secondes nocces*, Mr. Hartley of Hartley Hall; and that she had quite reinstated herself in her affectionate parent's good opinion and favour by so triumphantly recovering her position in "decent" society. Mrs. Nettlefold, with a sore pang, had almost resigned herself to the worst. She could not conceive that Louisa was in truth her best ally, rather than the formidable rival she appeared. The little woman herself could not forget that, desolate and poor, she had been sent empty away from her father's portal; and the very nobleness and generosity of her own nature made her indignation conquer the filial affection that had been so cruelly disappointed.

"No, no, Mr. Papa," said she to herself, "if you wouldn't have me poor, you *shan't* have me rich!—with a rich husband at least, which is, after all, a very different thing."

Mrs. Hartley has now been acquainted with this unpleasant truth for about a year and three quarters—that is, since the period at which she became Mrs. Hartley. Her papa loved money's worth dearly enough, but he never grudged her the cost of a single whim, except that of her "indecent" marriage. Her more generous husband forestalled every thoughtless caprice of his expensive idol—though at personal sacrifices that she now begins dimly to guess. But Mr. Hartley of Hartley Hall has never permitted her to forget that he owns the purse—for he holds it, and with no lax fingers. From the first she has perceived—for her mental sight is tolerably quick to indignity, and his rivulet of shallow phrases soon ran dry enough to see the stony bottom—that he chose a wife without fortune in order to keep his own in his own hands; that she is just to receive from him an allowance for personal expenses, hardly more than that which her father made her when she came home from school; and that even his housekeeper has more real authority at the Family Seat than herself.

Mr. Hartley not only loves money for money's sake, but he seems exclusively to love his *own* money. For he

has no desire whatever to effect a reconciliation with his wife's father. He foresees that, in such an event, he could no longer hope to treat his second wife in any respect as he treated his first; *she* lived in his house much like a poor relation, hired at a moderate salary to make herself generally useful or ornamental, as he might require, and admitted to a certain share of the good things belonging to his privileged condition. Now, it is true that Louisa did not exactly marry for love this time, but partly, perhaps, because she wanted more plums in her cake. Through vanity and inexperience, however, she quite mistook the quality of Mr. Hartley's regard for herself. She is not very worldly, but she felt childishly afraid of the solitary future, of which she could not help discerning the approach, on her brother-in-law's departure—a future poverty-stricken, or unfairly burdensome to her generous brother-in-law. There could be no other Willy in the world for her, she knew, but she did think it would be well for her and her child to be protected, loved, and cherished in a home of her own, by this amiable, deferential gentleman. He would surely make her a kind, indulgent husband; and in return she would be a good wife to him, and a tender mother to his little son. When she saw (only just too late) what was intended to be her real position in her new lord's house and consideration, the discovery was as a foot set on her womanish vanity and her womanly pride.

Had her heart been touched, it must have broken then; but her vanity and pride, like tempered steel, only started up against him from the pressure. She began to despise him forthwith, and arrived at indifference, rarely excited into active dislike, long before the time I now speak of.

She has tried heartily to be a loving mother to little Edward, not visiting on him the hard-hearted harshness of her husband as a step-parent. But the boy was undisguisedly withdrawn from her care and company as far as possible; and she was given to understand that her "system" of indulgence and familiar tenderness did not

suit Mr. Hartley's educational plans, nor those formed by his "departed mother." Mr. Hartley brandishes that grim old lady *in terrorem*, much as a first spouse is occasionally exhumed, and flourished in the face of a successor. He was domineered over by the tyrannical old dowager, exactly as he himself habitually domineers over others; and he toadied her precisely as he expects to be toadied himself by the rest of his world. You see his departed mother has left him a good deal of money, which she could have left at her pleasure to any one else, but which he always foretasted as his own, and fondly loved and clung to accordingly. Mr. Hartley was doomed to make disagreeable discoveries as well as Louisa. He soon perceived that his present wife was neither malleable nor killable; and he cannot tell how or why, but it is a dreadful fact, that Mrs. Hartley the second is not the least in the world in awe of him. Horrible to think, she adopts an almost contemptuous tone to him now and then! Yet this ingrate had no money of her own, and he took her out of a despicable hovel, to set her in his Family Seat. It is a painful fact that, whenever she has chosen to dispute a point with him, he has never come off the conqueror. Contentions respecting little Helen have well nigh ceased, for Louisa is absolutely impracticable on that subject; her husband has no doubt that she would take Helen, and quit his house at an hour's notice, or none, if he interfered with her will and way about her child. He has no hold on her; for he sees that, expensive and extravagant as her tastes and habits may be, her very ignorance of the value of money would cause her not to hesitate a moment in sacrificing it to any amount, where her strongest feelings are concerned. She is certainly just the thing he required to complete the adornment of his Family Seat. She has become a County Beauty, and extremely popular—any public quarrel or separation would expose him to scandal, ridicule, and inconvenience, which he dares not provoke, and which would sting him more than her.

Thus Louisa has, after all, more power in her hands than she cares to use. For a tyrant may always be trampled where he dares not trample. But she does not want to domineer over her husband; she is only resolute not to be domineered over by him; and being by far the cleverest and the most fearless of the two, she has established her independence wonderfully. That is, she is irreproachably civil to her lord in public; and in private also, there even permitting him the use of the overbearing tone he loves. Only towards herself he must never suit the action to the word. He may command, but he must put up with quite a reasonable obedience. Above all, let him lay but a finger on Helen's peace and joy, and, lo! Mrs. Louisa puts forth her might, and Hartley of Hartley Hall is under her foot!

Now, I must ask you to pass very hastily with me over nearly twelve years, dating from the marriage at Seabay; catching but a glimpse of our personages, and the changes that come to them. Of Mr. and Mrs. Hartley, growing into a couple nearly as tender and decorous as Mr. and Mrs. Nettlefold; of our particular friend the Sahib, prospering "deep in the Golden East," and regularly transmitting to England handsome portions of the gold he gathers there, for the use and behoof of his adopted daughter, always confiding the employ thereof to his co-guardian—Helen's mother. So he preserves the girl from that horrible contingency of dependence on her step-papa. You may picture to yourself that little drawing-room Beauty we knew, dilating and dignified through motherhood; refusing to part with her child, with the least leaf or bud of the young germinating soul—to any school-dame or governess. These two coming to love each other, not after the manner of the mothers and daughters of society, but with another, a tenderer, more religious than sister-love. Louisa's faults and follies were the natural fruit of that system of soul-gardening to which I have made allusion, and to which she has been subjected. She has force of mind enough to recognise that now, helped by dis-illusionizing experience and sober-

ing years, and most of all by passionate maternal affection. And at least she will plant no weeds of social bigotry in this plot of virgin soil; will run up no iron fences of irreligious conventionalism round about it; but, through sheer love, fearing and doubting herself in so dear a matter, she consigns her child's innocent soul to nature and God, hardly daring to train, content to prop—the guileless instinct.

As for book-lore, she teaches her all she can, with the help of masters, till the girlish intellect overtops the mother's accomplished ignorance; and then they learn together like loving comrades. See the two gracious heads together, over their dictionaries, their histories; see them tap each other's pretty fingers on the ivory keys; quarrel with each other's copy from the same cast; take each in turn for the other's model. But, through the close-knit lives they live, mother and daughter keep clear their individuality. The mother more stern yet weak; the daughter more gentle yet more strong: both utterly feminine.

The poor Lieutenant leads his solitary life—now on a three years' cruise, now obtaining his rank of "Master and Commander," now laid on the shelf again. Things remain unchanged at Danhaye Park and Nettlefold House.

And the dozen years are passed, like the arches of a viaduct; and now, *Eccoci quà!*

PART II.



CHAPTER I.

YOUNG MAN, AND MAIDEN.

AT about seven o'clock on a May evening, a young gentleman dismissed the fly that brought him from the Toxeter station, at the lodge-gate of a beautiful park. A woman came out of the lodge, and hastily bidding her take his portmanteau, he turned off from the broad double avenue of new-fledged beeches, and struck across the park, there studded with flowering hawthorns. He vanished into a copse, plunging among the gold-green spray of its vernal foliage, and a few minutes after stood among flower-beds on a great lawn, overshadowed by tall trees. Here he paused a moment, and surveyed the spacious landscape of hill and vale, now in their flush of blossoming orchards, like a vast rose-garden. Clusters of stately trees, low-feathering, cast their long shadows on the smoothly undulating lawn, that swept down from the eminence on which he stood. On his right rose a comely old brick mansion, partly covered with creepers.

Edward Hartley felt as if he had seen it all in a dream. The smell of the country, of the moist English spring, ravished him ! It seemed like a new sense.

The sun was just setting after a fitful time. Large stormy clouds were pouring from a little north to the region of the dying day ; and long spaces of pale gold

smiled under those lifted black curtains, smirched here and there by lines of trailing vapour.

Edward walked through an open window into the house, and went from room to room. He presently encountered a servant, who recognised him without much emotion (emotions were suppressed by law at Hartley Hall), and told him that Mr. and Mrs. Hartley were gone out to dinner, and Miss Ashton was out riding. Edward issued forth again by the stone porch and walked up and down before the door, waiting, not at all impatiently, for the return of Miss Ashton, and greatly enjoying the hues and smells of the May evening.

But the overshadowing storm grew murkier and murkier. The trees shook through all their branches and down came the shower thick and fast: our young gentleman retreated under the porch, stood there, and sniffed voluptuously the delicious freshness. All at once through the sough and patter of the large rain, there rang the quick doubling of hoofs; then a lady on a white pony, followed by a groom, dashed out of that blinding veil, and jumped—into Edward's arms.

"Helen!"

"Edward! Edward! is it you?"

"Yes, it's me. Do you mean that you are not going to kiss me?"

"I mean it—but I'm very glad you're come."

"Let me kiss you, then."

"No, no, nonsense: I'm quite in earnest. But come in. They are gone to dine at Broadleigh: we didn't expect you till to-morrow."

When they got into the dusky drawing-room, Edward lighted the candles on the mantel-piece, that he might see her plainly, without her hat. He thought she had grown quite beautiful, and instantly told her so. Helen was very young, not quite seventeen, and not at all accustomed to be stared at. Disconcerted by Edward's pitiless admiration, she cast down her eyes, and shyly turned her face a little aside.

"Dear me," said he again, "you are grown perfectly beautiful, Helen!"

"How can you say so, Edward? You used to tell me that I was safe to be ugly."

"Yes, when I went away you had lost all your baby prettiness. You threatened to be squab and snubby. And lo! I find you a young Juno! Don't go away: do stand there a little, and let me look at you."

But Helen, not being positively a cast from the Vatican, could by no means consent to stand there, and be studied by Edward, shading his eyes with his hand. So, slipping away, she sat down in a sofa corner, confused, half vexed, perhaps half pleased.

Then Edward came and sat down by her, and asked her what she thought of *him*.

"I think you are looking very well," said she.

"In health or beauty?"

"Oh! beauty—As for that, I have not looked at you enough to form an opinion."

"But *do* look at me," insisted Edward; "stop!" getting up and fetching one of the candles—"now!"

Helen laughed with all her heart, as he stood before her, quite gravely, holding the candle at different elevations, to exhibit himself.

"What a delicious laugh you have! But what are you laughing at? Am I ridiculously ugly?"

"No, you are almost as good-looking as—as conceited," said Ellen.

"How nice of you! But am I like my father?"

"Not in the least."

"Thank you," said Edward, solemnly, and put down the candle to shake hands with her. He then seated himself again by her, and said:

"I can't think why you won't let me kiss you."

This did not embarrass her at all.

"Nobody is to kiss me but mamma," said she; "nobody ever does: I don't like it. Besides, it is not the Hartley fashion."

"But I am not in Hartley fashion," rejoined Edward,

impatently ; " I'm nobody - who is to kiss you, you say ? Oh ! Helen, I hope you are not a prude. I shall hate you if you are, in spite of your beauty."

" Oh ! hate me if you like," said Helen, with the least possible toss of her fine young head, the least possible touch of coquetry in her tone and look.

She could not be called vain or coquettish : she was too fresh and innocent ; but Edward had taken her by surprise. He had left England a clever, handsome, insolent youth of seventeen, who treated her with that sincere contempt which such a youth is sure to manifest towards shapeless, chaotic little girls of twelve. She was undeniably handsome and graceful now, and it was probable that she knew it. But suddenly to find herself the object of Edward's demonstrative admiration was what flattered her, and stirred that imperceptible sediment of coquetry which lies at the bottom of the purest female heart ; Edward, who had said (how well she now remembered words that had scarcely vexed her when spoken) she was " safe to be ugly." Then he himself was so new and dazzling a being to the inexperienced young girl. Perhaps not regularly handsome, his thick, wavy, black locks, his square brow and violet eyes, his elegant eccentricity, even his frank affectation and vanity, made him at once but too charming in her eyes. He wore his follies so gracefully ! and to one purely simple as herself, his little sentimental speeches sounded too impulsive to be ridiculous.

About eleven o'clock, Mr. and Mrs. Hartley returned. Edward was received with paternal majesty, if not tenderness, by the former, and with the sweetest graciousness by his stepmother. When they left the room for a few minutes, Edward expressed his opinion of them to Helen with perfect openness.

" My father is even worse than I remembered : such a bad style of man ! But mamma is miraculously pretty," quoth he. " I'm not in the least changed, it seems to me, apparently about twenty-five. Her voice as

sweet and flexible as a young girl's—even as yours. But you are by far the handsomest, Helen.”

Helen with enthusiasm contradicted this verdict.

“Mamma is the most beautiful little woman in the world !” she declared, hotly.

“She is not fit to tie your shoe.”

“No, I should think not !” cried Helen ; “but I am just fit to tie hers !”

And she flew to her mother, who just then re-entered, and sat down on the floor, and took her little foot on her lap, and untied and tied the slipper—looking round and up at Edward with eyes that flashed and glistened.

“What is the matter with my shoe ?” said Mrs. Hartley, mystified.

“Nothing, mamma ; I have tied it, that’s all,” replied Helen, kissing it, and putting it down tenderly. After which little scene she got up and seated herself sedately enough, but with a triumphant glance at Edward.

CHAPTER II

THE MOTHER'S DOUBT.

WHEN Edward was about seventeen, there had been talk of his going to college. He discovered that his father meant to make him an allowance which by no means met his own views of the adequate and proper. He resolved at once not to go to Oxford or Cambridge at all. The shrewd boy was perfectly aware that any remonstrance on his part would be but wasted pearls of eloquence cast before his pig-headed sire. He therefore contented his natural feelings by calling him between his teeth an old screw, and then humbly requested his acquiescence in a different arrangement. Would his father allow him rather to enter a certain German

university? His bent of mind was towards particular studies, which could be far more advantageously pursued there. His Eton crony, young Baldwin, was going to adopt this plan. It was one he should infinitely prefer, if his father would be kind enough to permit it.

Young Baldwin was the eldest son of a neighbouring baronet, and Lady Jane, his wife. The scheme, therefore, would not be *infra dig.*, even for the only son of Hartley of Hartley Hall. The Baldwins were poor people of condition, having a large family, and doubtless economy was one of the advantages they sought in this foreign university. The horrent ghosts of Mr. Hartley's own Ch. Ch. bills, defrayed by his departed mother, rose warningly before his mental vision, and induced him to accede to the meek proposition of his heir.

Edward and young Baldwin went away together; but in two or three years the latter returned, while his friend got leave to go to Italy, where he dissipated about two years more of absence. At the end of that time he found that his various pursuits—not altogether intellectual, or ostensible—had deposited him knee-deep in a slough of debt, and that, in defraying it, his allowance was forestalled by two-thirds for a good while to come. In this unpleasant position of his affairs, the first step advisable was clearly homewards. Home (such as the Family Seat was) would at least supply him with the necessaries of a “decent” existence, and the poor remnant of his income would scantily furnish him with pocket-money. He was far too worldly wise a young gentleman to hamper his future with post-obits, and too sensible to meditate any filial confidences, or appeal to liberality and indulgence that he knew, by experience, had no existence in the paternal breast. He expected nothing, therefore, in coming to Hartley Hall, but to drce a bitter penance for pleasant peccadilloes. He had come, reluctantly enough, to vegetate awhile on the family acres; but to find that he could do it in company with so blooming a vegetable as Helen, was relief inexpressible, amounting to rapture! He already adored her

for the pleasantness of that surprise. From force of habit, he never felt quite comfortable without an adored object; and he had gone without ever since he left Venice, and Marietta—almost a month ago. The sweet, pure morning freshness of the English maiden looked half divine to the travelled young gentleman, arriving all weary and soiled from the slippery byways of Continental intrigue.

A very short time after Edward Hartley's return to his ancestral halls sufficed to make him the spoiled child of the house.

Even the paternal Screw unstiffened miraculously, and prosed away quite affably to his only son, after dinner. The truth is, Mr. Hartley was so agreeably surprised at encountering no appeal to his pocket, that the young man's absurdities of manner, also his long hair, also his short pipe, also his wide-sleeved velvet coat, though abominable and obnoxious, met with quite mild reprobation.

But, for mother and daughter—to one the lively charming young man seemed a godsend; to the other (alas!) almost as a god.

He devoted himself to them. He told them his adventures (the tellable ones); he made them laugh, he made them cry; he read poetry, and wrote it for them; he rode with—he drove them; he sang; he painted; he was the admirable Edward Hartley Crichton! So improved! so unselfish! his temper so sweet! Everybody said so, except that—

"Tatt doesn't like Edward, mamma," says Helen, one day.

"Why?" asks mamma.

"I don't know," rejoins Helen, "but she *doesn't*. She says she doesn't like the eyes of 'un.'"

"What?" cries Mrs. Hartley, laughing.

"When I asked her why, that's what she said, mamma—'Never you mind, Miss Helen, but I don't like the eyes of 'un.'"

"And poor Edward has really beautiful slate-coloured

eyes, with such dark, thick eyelashes," remarks Mrs. Hartley.

Helen is happening to look out of window, and only says—

"Here he is!"

Edward comes in laughing, joyous, charming. He sits down by Mrs. Hartley, and begins talking to the two women, while they work; running on in his monologuish way; the way that one of them likes, and the other—Ah, the unprized, priceless gems that these chancicleers scratch up, and peck at,—and leave!

"I have had such a delicious ride!" cries Edward; "I got entangled in a lot of manors and lanes; hawthorn and dogrose bowered me, late primroses winked at me from every side, violets hung from the hedgerows, not wagging their sweet heads. The little birdies sang like mad! I rode along in a kind of dream; my mind went over years of placid country life. Dear me! how pleasant it is to have a spacious imagination. You live through in a few minutes what others can only know by the experience of a life. You *pregust* all kind of existence. For five minutes you're a farmer, riding about on a grey cob, looking at the green points of your wheat; then you're a merchant—if you like; then a soldier; then a statesman, electrifying the House,—and so on. All things by turns, and yet nothing. How unpleasant to be anything! If you are decidedly something, you can't be anything else. The actual is too absorbing; you can't *pregust* any more; you can't stand, 'sipping like a fly' from the edge of the cream-jug; you are tumbled in over head and ears! Ah, unhappy fly!"

"But then, in the meantime, you are really doing nothing," observes young Helen, sagely. "Carlyle says——,"

"Oh, don't!" groans Edward, making a face of weariness and terror. "I know it all. Dignity of work; going gracefully idle in Mayfair—Oh, please, don't, there's a dear! Let me off now, I'm so tired and com-

fortable. Carlyle me when I can run away. Are we going to have a dinner party to-night, mamma?"

"I—yes, we are," she answers absently. She is looking at her girl, whose bent head and long locks do not conceal a beautiful pink flush from the mother's eye. She sees that not so much what Edward said, but his tone, half jeer, half sneer, startled and wounded the sensitive child. Her Helen! The mother's heart rises against him. Does he deserve her? Can he appreciate her? Will he be tender enough with her tender darling? From the first she has plainly perceived his delight (perfectly undisguised, indeed) in her child's beauty and sweetness. But does he thoroughly appreciate her rare intelligence, her noble temper, her adorable simplicity, her unsunned modesty, her artless virgin dignity?—And still more plainly, now, she perceives the state of her Helen's heart. The mother has hitherto found no reason for interference. Granting, as a matter of course, that neither Edward nor any man could *deserve* to possess her diamond of a girl, it seems the most natural and desirable of marriages for her. For Edward has returned to them so greatly altered for the better. His talents so developed; his temper so genial and so kindly; such a truly charming young man, that she took him to her generous impulsive heart at once, and observed, almost without one jealous motherly pang, the love-at-first-sight that flashed its rapturous telegrams between the young couple.

Helen, glancing up, catches her mother's fond and troubled eye. She rises, says something confusedly about speaking to Tatt, and is going out of the room.

All Edward's perceptions are naturally keen, only their fine edge has got dulled in the moral sloth of egotism.

He has noted the little momentary scene; Helen's quick blush,—the mother's kindling eye, the tear in her girl's. He is sincerely astonished and sorry: he looks after Helen, and then jumping up, takes hold of her by a sash-ribbon that floats behind her as she goes.

"Is it possible I pained her," says he, looking round at her mother, "by that rough-spoken way I have? What a dear sensitive child it is! Don't think me a brute, mamma: I am so used to talk to my he-friends, I forget how different this delicate creature is. Do forgive me, both of you!"

Of course it ends by both women blaming themselves for having blamed him!

CHAPTER III.

THE EVIL EYE.

THIS course of true love seemed to run mighty smooth at the Family Seat. But it only gave a short-lived contradiction to the experience of ages, and Lysander.

In spite of the good mother-fairy, that baleful eye of the wicked magician which had, so long ago, appalled the poor little princess, now fell, threatening blight, on the blossom of her young love.

Edward and Helen were just visible, dropping down the garden slopes in the sweet cool and glittering calm after rain of a latter June evening. They generally spent these summer evenings thus. And, morning or evening, were, indeed, seldom apart.

That *mal'occhio* turned fishily from them towards Mrs. Hartley, seated opposite, still eating strawberries serenely; and a solemn voice addressed her.

"It becomes necessary for me to observe that this does not please me, and that it must discontinue."

"I don't understand you," replied Mrs. Hartley, looking up in some surprise, and discontinuing to eat her strawberries, as if he meant that.

It is quite true that she did not understand his meaning. She was always so far from thinking the same thoughts. Just now she had been revolving in her mind the dampness of the evening in connection with the thinness of her Helen's shoes

"If I must express myself in more distinct terms, Mrs. Hartley, I *must*."

And pausing, apparently expecting that she would be perverse enough to disagree with him, he continued,—

"I shall not permit my son to marry your daughter."

And then he leaned back in his chair, laid his fingertips together, and shut his eyes—with his bad smile.

Louisa started up aghast, irritated, scornful.

"You will not permit!—you will not permit!"

She was breathless.

"I will never permit it," said the potentate of Hartley Hall, with as much complacent arrogance as if the Family Seat were a throne.

"And why?"

"Because I do not approve of such a union. My son must marry (when he does marry) far differently. Unequal marriages are blunders, Mrs. Hartley. My son may as well have the advantage of experience that *he* has not paid for."

"Unequal marriages!"

Indignation choked the mother—luckily, perhaps. She could not utter another word at that moment. She did not even perceive the personal insult. Her Helen! her Helen!

Mr. Hartley went on, with the bad smile almost widened into a grin.

"Any small independence—her—her Indian Uncle" (waving his hand superciliously in the direction of Calcutta) "may be able to bestow on her, will of course help your daughter to settle suitably in life; but really, the Hartleys have had enough of disinterested matches for a generation or two."

His wife was far out of reach of his taunts—the fine old English gentleman that he was! All her astonished, angry, agonized heart bled and cried out for her girl—her Helen! her Helen!

But, as I said, the surprise took her breath, and made her rage and grief dumb. The poor little woman stood a moment looking at her lord—not lovingly I must own,

not duteously, not reverently—but, morally and metaphorically, like a lioness whose cub is wounded, or, for the matter of that, a dove whose fledgling is assailed—“ready to peck in safeguard of her brood”—(see *Nature* and *Shakspeare*). And then Hartley of Hartley Hall, his bad smile at its worst, found himself alone with his glory, wine, and strawberries—his brows bound with victorious wreaths.

I dare say he felt delightfully comfortable. He had been patiently, or impatiently, waiting his opportunity for twelve years: it had never presented itself till now; but now, in how complete, how soul-satisfying a shape!

He had always hated his step-daughter, ever since she flew at him, and hammered him with her five-year-old fists, in the act of proposing to become her step-papa. She had turned his sublime into ridiculous, and injured his dear little dignity—offences never to be sponged from his memory. Very likely, however, he would have detested her almost as much had that fatal incident never occurred; for he had a natural abhorrence of children—such as he always had—hating them constitutionally as the devil hates holy water.

And then, ever since his marriage to her mother, Helen had been in an attitude towards him which inevitably increased that repulsion. She was a member of his family, ostensibly under his authority, immeasurably his inferior in age, sex, wealth, and position; yet absolutely independent of him, free of him, defended from the lightest touch of that heavy thumb under which he could keep, more or less, all the rest of the happy family at the Family Seat. And in herself so gallingly indifferent to what she took for his indifference! For Helen, if she could not imagine that her step-father liked her in the least, was innocently unsuspecting of anything in his feelings towards her, worse than absence of affection.

At last he had repaid himself with interest the debt at first incurred by those tiny fists twelve years ago; horribly accumulating ever since against child, and mother, and even against the unconscious “Indian

uncle." Well as Hartley of Hartley Hall loved his money, he loved his hates even better; and bitterly he had come to hate those three who had evaded and nullified his domestic absolutism. Helen would have been equally tabooed, had Ashton been a veritable "Oncle d'Amérique," safe to drop in on the wedding eve, and present Helen with a trifle of a pocket-book stuffed with thousand-pound notes, and Oriental jewellery, instead of the moderate provision that was ever likely to come from him to his adopted daughter. Barbaric pearl and gold could not, would not, should not, buy vengeance from offended deity!

Meanwhile, young man and maid drop down the golden slopes, their long shadows mixed into one, moving beside them—blissful as a pair of angels. Not that a word of downright love-making has yet passed between them. Poor Helen has never even asked herself the question of questions which Edward has not yet put to her: Does she love him?

But, all unquestioned, love has entered her life. The dangerous sweetness has been dropped into her cup, and makes the draught divine.

Love heightens her girlish beauty with touches that make it so enchanting—Edward cannot look away from her for an instant. The young gentleman of twenty-two, for his part, is already a veteran in the primrose paths, and to a certain extent knows very well what they are both about. He knows that he is so very seriously in love that he has actually even a kind of timid trembling half-doubt as to the perfect reciprocity of her feelings.

But, after all, it is only just the tender little agony of suspense necessary to keep up the interest of this delicious Idyl, only enough to give its exquisite zest to the sweet child's impending confession that she adores him.

They enter a flickering bowered path, skirting a coppice, along the verge of a steep, craggy bank. They can hear Hartley-brook poppling and gurgling over the pebbles below, can now and then catch a flash of it

between the dog-rose thickets that toss garlands over the little woody precipice. On their other hand, dwarf oaks, deep in all manner of ferny and flowery undergrowth, spread out their straight arms and roof the path. On the brook side, sunset filters through labyrinthine stems and leaves, and dyes all it touches with fiery rose. This arcade, full of passionate crimson rays, looks like the very porch of love, and right fit for those young lovers who advance up it.

Advance very silently at last, though they set out laughing and chattering light-heartedly enough. At the end of this bowery winding walk they come—not to the temple of love exactly, but, after the descent of a few steps, to a little rustic summer-house and bench, niched in the dark-red shrubby crag, and overlooking Hartley lake, the prize view of the Family Seat.

They have come here on purpose that Edward may read Helen a little poem. She found him writing it this afternoon, and insisted that he should bring and read it aloud to her in this favourably poetical spot. She did not in the least guess that it was a love-sonnet made to her eyebrow.

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

At this point I find myself called on to write a love-scene. Those young people who read my book won't be satisfied without, and yet I know they won't be satisfied with it. And quite right, too. If young people could be contented with any such simulacra, they might for ever sit poring over novels and romances, when they should be making real, hearty love of their own. Blearing their sight with printed paper instead of regaling it with wanderings into those mysterious worlds we call eyes. Eyes, the soul's vestibule! her fringed porch, full of delicious shadows, more changeful than the

coming and going of the sunlight in vine-clad summer
arbours!

“ — Not easily forgiven
Are those who, setting wide the doors that bar
The secret bridal chambers of the heart,
Let in the day.”

TENNYSON, *The Gardener's Daughter*.

I am not quite sure but that it *is* a sort of sin to let in the light on the absurdities of lovers; and a sin almost always bringing its own punishment in failure. I dare not open but a little way those “doors, that bar the secret bridal chambers of the heart.” Majestic love-making has something rather ridiculous about it, though Homer has no doubt thrown a sort of dignity into the loves of the gods and goddesses. The infantine babble, and billing and cooing, of Romeos and Juliets, is far more in keeping with the subject. I am depressed by the love-making of Milton's Adam and Eve. Adam always seems to me as if he had a hymn-book in his pocket.

In old times there appears to have been a notion that religious people should all go away into convents; as if there were decidedly something heathen about love, and serious people couldn't conscientiously kiss. I return to the point. A love-scene will be expected by my young friends at this juncture, and I can but comply with their legitimate demands.

Therefore, *revenons à nos moutons*.

“Now!” Helen says, seating herself in a corner of the rustic bench.

Edward sits down in the other corner, silently, trembling, nervous as a tyro, not daring to look at her any more. He is so very much in love, and knows what tale his eyes would tell, and is even afraid that he might fall at her feet and sob it all out like a great simple boy.

He makes one or two beginnings, and then manages to read his poem—regular love-verses, unmistakably full of Helen, only his voice is so stifled in the commotion

of his feelings, that she cannot hear one word in ten. She is tantalized, and cries impatiently—

“But please do read a little louder!—oh, please, do!”

They are just pretty, fond stanzas, hardly worth hearing—except to Helen, because they are his. Edward is but an elegant versifier, and, to do him justice, recognizes the fact as thoroughly as the Weekly Scarifier could whip it into him.

When he comes to the end, Helen asks him to give her the poem, that she may read it to herself. As he places it in her outstretched palm he lifts his eyes—lets them at last speak, and tell her all. The poem drops in her lap—

Smitten, dazzled, the young girl throws her hands over her face, in a sudden exquisite trouble, the bewildering tumult of surprised virginal passion.

There is a minute's silence, which Edward breaks with an eager whisper.

“Yes, now you know—now you know that I adore you! Helen, speak; have you nothing—nothing, not a word for me?”

Still she sits motionless, with her hands over her face. Strong as the young man's emotion is, how little can he understand hers: the shock of ecstasy—the terrible strange joy! Perhaps not even the tenderest and deepest-natured man comprehends the mystery of first love in a young girl's heart, when the fiery lily bursts into blossom at some moment like this.

Softly, but a little impatiently, Edward draws down her hands, holds them, kisses them, feeds his heart on her bent face—a sweet face, flushed, with down-cast eyes, girlish, noble, with shining careless chestnut locks about it. Still she sits motionless before him. He gets up and says reproachfully,—

“Not a word? Then your silence desires me to leave you. I will go——”

He does not mean it, of course, only moves a step, to bring her to her feet. She starts up, and now stands before him, breathing quick, with down-cast eyes, motionless as before. He comes very close, speaks very softly—

"Good-bye, Helen. Ah, Helen! at least your hand—I know you deny me more."

He only says it to be so sweetly contradicted! For now, at last, all of a sudden, with a low passionate cry like a sob, she is clinging to his breast, holding up her innocent mouth for first love's first kiss—

In that moment and act of acceptance a woman appears, I suppose, more lovely to her lover than anything he can ever hope to see again in bride or wife.

CHAPTER V.

FIRST EFFECTS OF THE PAPAL INTERDICT.

ABOUT an hour later Helen ran up to her own room. Her mother was sitting there in the twilight, at the open window, looking out on a fusing landscape, under a sweet, pale sky with long dusky streaks athwart the fading gold.

Helen was already so full of wonderful new perceptions, that she did not see anything strange in that solitary maternal watch there.

"Mamma, mamma!" said her girl, running to her, kneeling, and clasping her arms about her.

"Helen! my Helen! my child!"

And then, through the broken, happy, whispered love-tale, came the stifled bitter sobs of the poor mother.

At last, even blissful Helen could not help hearing them, stopped short, and said half pettishly—she was but a petted child, you know, and barely seventeen years old—

"Where is the harm? I have done nothing wrong. Mamma! mamma! don't cry so!"

"Dearest child," said her mother, and took the girl's face in her two hands, looking adoringly into it through her own tears; "dear, dear child, his father forbids it.

His father will forbid Edward to marry you. No matter why, no matter why—but it is to be forbidden. Oh, my Helen! my Helen! is it your mother's fault? I'm afraid, I'm afraid I should have taken better care of you, dear!" faltered the poor mother—while her daughter silently embraced and kissed her.

All the tears fell from Louisa's eyes. When Helen had clasped and kissed her fondly, the young girl rose up and stood still, staring out of the window, with her right hand on the edge, her face looking very white in the purple glimmer of the summer dusk. They remained thus a good while. The mother holding her girl's left hand, her own face down on it; the daughter upright and silent, looking out.

At last there came a tap at the door. It was worthy Mrs. Tatt, whom we have not seen for so long. She wished to know if Miss Helen was there.

"Yes, nurse," said Helen promptly; "I am here."

Did she want a light?

"Yes, nurse, bring one, please," said Helen.

Louisa was surprised at her child's voice. No trembling, no tears in it; sweet and steady as usual; a little more treble and sustained, perhaps, as when a woman speaks with careful distinctness.

The light was placed on the dressing-table; Helen came from the window and smoothed her hair; her mother sat still and looked at her face anxiously. It was lovely and pleasant to behold. Not pale, sorrowful, or fearful, but happy and fair; yet there was a look in it that even her mother had never seen there before.

When she was ready to go down-stairs, she came to her mother and spoke quietly.

"Mamma, you are sure of what you said just now? Edward's father will forbid him to marry me?"

"He told me so himself. Yes, there can be no mistake, my child—my poor child!"

"Why do you say that, mamma?"

Louisa looked at her, puzzled.

"Edward's father has no right to forbid him to marry

me. It can make no difference : Edward loves me. God forbids him to commit a sin in obedience to any man, and it would be a great sin to break the heart of a poor harmless girl like me. What have I done to his father that he should hate me ? But it's no matter at all ; he can't make Edward unlove me ! ”

The haughty young sophist turned to go, with a natural majesty that very few hereditary queens, I fancy, get with their purple, and “all their trumpery,” among the royal properties. But she ran back to take her mother by the hand, and they went down-stairs together.

In the drawing-room they found father and son. Edward had only just come in ; there had been no time to make him cognizant of the fatal bull issued by their domestic Pope.

But Helen accelerated matters by her grand defiant airs. She treated her step-papa not with her customary well-behaved indifference, but with a magnificent superciliousness. She poured out the tea as usual, and called Edward from the other side of the room to ask his father, who was not far from her elbow, if he would have any more. When some letters and notes were brought in, and the head of the house held out one to her, she sweetly begged her mamma to take it, from her hand receiving the missive ; and the naughty child pointedly confined her conversation to Mrs. Hartley and Edward. And finally, she begged Mr. Hartley's pardon, with a scornful curtsy, for touching him with her skirts as she presently sailed past him out of the room.

Hartley, of Hartley Hall, was not the potentate to put up with such treatment from an impertinent young miss. He looked at her balefully with his *mal' occhio*, half in wrath, half in sincere amazement. He easily guessed that her mother had made her acquainted with the papal interdict, but he could not at all understand the result. He had cheerfully made up his mind to red eyes and sulks ; had quite pleasantly anticipated a couple of women in hysterics, weeping and praying for mercy,

kneeling and kissing the papal slipper, perhaps; but defiance so insolent, so impotent, was an absurdity too monstrous to have suggested itself as a possibility. However, it was not worth pausing upon: it could make no difference. As soon as the young lady's skirts had vanished, her step-papa turned fiercely to his son.

"You will stay. I have a few words to say to you."

Edward presaged a scene. Helen's singular demeanour, and her mother's fixed gravity, prepared him partly for what was to come. He had a horror of a tempest-in-a-teacup kind of uproar in which the small soul of his father loved to ride the whirlwind, and direct the storm. No young Sybarite gentleman was ever more particular respecting the smoothness of his rose-leaves. He liked everything and everybody about him to be, or at least to look, serene and joyous. His father's stupid pompousness and undignified dignity bored and disgusted him. But he was ready to be dutiful, and to humour the paternal bore, for any solid advantage. Mr. Edward Hartley was by no means unmindful of expediency, and although but a young gentleman, knew, with an accuracy worthy of far maturer pupils of the world, on which side his bread was buttered.

He put down the book that he had taken up with an air of flight, before his father had spoken, and looked respectful and attentive.

Hartley, of Hartley Hall, went and stood with his back to the fireplace, in which there was no fire: doubtless the fine old English gentleman felt his greatness greater there—his foot on his native Hearth. He did not look at his son—let me whisper that I believe he was positively a little afraid of the young man of the world, a little in awe of the grey head on green shoulders. But he spoke with all his wonted majesty.

"Your conduct has displeased me. Understand that I do not approve of a marriage between yourself and Mrs. Hartley's daughter. I forbid it, and will never under any circumstances whatever consent to it."

The elderly gentleman looked furtively over his pocket-handkerchief at his son, and blew his nose.

Edward kept his countenance, but he was horribly annoyed, finding himself on the horns of a dilemma. His own parent represented one horn, and Helen's the other. Nothing would have been easier, or indeed more consistent with truth, than the reply which would have satisfied his father. He had only to assure him, very sincerely, that few events had been further from his contemplations than his marriage with anybody. That he "meant nothing serious by the natural intimacy and harmless gallantry induced by his domestication with a very handsome young lady." But agreeable as this explanation might be to the Head of his house, the young man of the world had not the courage, perhaps the heart, to choose this line of defence or exculpation, in the hearing and under the eyes of Helen's mother. Eyes not looking furtively, but fixedly at him, grave, anxious, and almost stern.

"Do you hear me?" said his father.

Edward passed his hand over his face, and made a grimace of annoyance behind that screen at the exquisite irksomeness of the position—which was what he felt most.

Then he got up.

"Certainly I heard you, sir," said he, slightly bowing. "Good night."

Then he took his stepmother's hand, pressed it, kissed it, with an agitated countenance, *turned from his father*—and exit.

That was how he got off the stage.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. EDWARD HARTLEY'S "INTENTIONS."

LOUISA left the room almost directly after Edward, and went upstairs to Helen, who was standing at her window again

"Well, mamma?" said the girl.

Her mother told her all that had passed; little as it was, every word, every look, as far as she had observed them, making a narrative of it. Both felt a pang of disappointment (which neither even secretly owned), that Edward had not, with the fearless frankness of honest love, at once asserted himself and his resolution. But the "agitated countenance," which Louisa docilely reported, quite satisfied Helen.

"Poor fellow—dear Edward!" she murmured, "he could not trust himself all at once to speak to his father. I know so well what he must have been feeling. I know him so well!"

Poor child! dear Helen! Oh, poor women, dear young sisters,—you sad fools! you little know how little you know about these Beloved Objects, whose infinitely idealised portraits some of you cuddle, and kiss, and cry over, all your beautiful wasted youth!

Next morning, after breakfast, Edward had an interview with his parent, during which one of them at least came to a clear understanding respecting the "serious intentions" of the other.

Mr. Hartley explicitly stated his inalterable resolve to disinherit his heir-at-will, in the event of his marriage with Miss Ashton; unpleasantly reminded the young man that the family estate had not been an entailed one for two generations; and that his being the only son of the magnate who addressed him, did not in the least preclude his easy and abrupt declension into simple beggary, under certain circumstances.

The young gentleman, with a very white and working face, was able, however, to pause a moment till he could speak composedly, and then briefly replied:—

"I have not the least intention of marrying at present, and I know what I shall forfeit if I choose to marry in defiance of your commands. I believe you can require me to say no more, sir."

And walked out of the window into the garden with a good deal more genuine agitation than that which he had

so carefully betrayed to his stepmother the night before.

In fact, he chafed very much under the pompous despotism of his father's address, and could not bring himself to adopt exactly the duteous tone of which he had overnight recognised the necessity or policy.

The good and bad in him were almost equally galled by the friction of his father's threats. Manliness and vanity winced alike under the arrogant but by no means idle menaces of the arbiter of his fortunes. The bitter temper of selfish mortification even helped that honest young passion in him, that love in his heart which was but a little oasis in a desert of wicked worldliness.

He strode about the shrubberies, making angry faces at his own thoughts, and suddenly came on Helen, slowly walking betwixt the verdant screens.

At sight of her his mood changed magically; "Eccola!" cried he, beaming with joyous love, and throwing out his arms—

Helen was but seventeen years old, I must again remind you, and still believed her lover, as she loved him, with her whole soul. She had hardly been uneasy or anxious about the result of the conference which she knew was taking place in the study, for she had harboured no doubt of her beloved object. At seventeen, what woman has any notion of Brummagem love?—of how the article is adulterated to make it marketable?

"I want to speak to you," said Edward, hurriedly; "go on slowly to Mill Lane, Helen darling, and I'll join you in a quarter of an hour."

"But——" began she, surprised, quite unsuspecting, however.

"I must go back to the house first," interrupted Edward. "Ah, don't refuse me."

She had not the least intention, did not guess why she should; but went to keep her first assignation—as innocent of it as a baby.

It was a shady lane under elm boughs, between mossy hedges, thick-starred with June flowers, which Helen,

loitering, gathered. She did not wait long. Edward had gone back to the house in order that his father might see or hear him going upstairs to his own room, and *not* do either when he came down again directly after. The young gentleman was naturally fond of intrigue, a love without a mask would all the sooner have fatigued him. If his father wanted to disgust him with Helen, and to break her heart with speedy desertion (and what else *did* he want, I wonder?) he might have freely consented to the engagement of the young people, or—still better—have insisted on it.

When the pair met in the lane, they had a long and tender love-talk, of course. But Edward interspersed it with indignant comments on his parent.

"I can't stand him!" cried the son; "he is a human file, and rasps me to death. Conceive his reminding me of my total dependence on him! his power to cut me out of the property if I offended him. Descending to that dirty menace! Fancy, what vulgarity! How painful to have a father who is such a snob!"

"And so he threatened you, Edward?" says Helen, softly—commiserating, but not anxious. She had no more notion of property than mamma had when she eloped with papa about eighteen years ago. It is rather nice (she secretly thinks) that there seems an opportunity for them to sacrifice something, even "dross," to their love.

So matters went for some days; Edward contriving assignations, the secrecy of which was as great a secret to Helen as to his father. She never dreamed of concealing these interviews and lovers' rambles from her mother, nor did Mrs. Hartley take any measures to keep them apart. Being imprudently romantic even now, she sincerely thought that Edward made no undue sacrifice when he preferred Helen to the family estate, which she took for granted that he did. They would not be destitute; Helen brought her provision from her "Indian uncle," and Edward his noble independence of youth, education, and ability. But all this time the rash, loving

mother, content to build a cottage instead of a castle for her child, was building even that modest tenement in the air. All this time, in all his love-talks with Helen, Edward had not in fact breathed a syllable about engagement or marriage. He had simply assured her of his adoration, in that endless variety of phrase which, under certain circumstances, seems to render each assurance more satisfactory and less satisfying. But at length Mrs. Hartley, not being beguiled in the like agreeable manner, did take the alarm suddenly, and discovered what only a tender delicacy, or romantic imprudence, had prevented her eliciting sooner.

One day, these three being alone together, Helen's mother rose up, put her hand on the arm of her daughter's lover, and said—

"Edward, you compromise my child."

She was very much agitated, and the young gentleman entreating her, in a low voice, to sit down, appeared greatly disturbed also. But she looked at him steadily and wistfully, waiting for him to reply.

Helen, taken by surprise, sprang to her feet, and then stood still, looking from one to the other with startled eyes, her cheeks rosy-red.

"My dear mamma," said Edward, at last, "you are right. I love you and thank you. I have been very culpable. Forgive me."

"But," said the mother, painfully impatient and dissatisfied, revolting from the utterance of that plain question which seemed degrading to her daughter, "what am I to understand?—what course do you promise me to pursue in future?"

Edward did not glance at the young creature who stood at his side, just a little behind him.

"My dear, dear Mrs. Hartley," said he, in a perturbed manner, "what *ought* I to do? You know my miserable position. Dependence, utter dependence on my father: beggary, if he choose to make it so."

No, she *could* not say—"Ask my daughter to be your wife. Work for her: be poor and happy together."

He knew she could not, and waited.

"Ask yourself," said she, hurriedly.

"I do," answered the young man; "but it is a bitter answer I get. I cannot deny that I ought to *go*—that this sacrifice is the only reparation I can make for the mischief I have done here."

His voice was broken; he felt a hearty selfish pain in parting with his pleasure.

"Your dear daughter is too young to shed many tears for me. I am quite, quite unworthy of one drop from her eyes, one regret of her sweet soul—"

"Mamma! mamma!" cried out the poor child, with a heart-rent dying sob—and flung herself at her mother's feet, and hid her face in her mother's lap.

She uttered no other word or sound; when Mrs. Hartley lifted her head tenderly, her eyes were closed, she was white as death. But she had not fainted, only lay there, fallen at her mother's knees, heart-struck.

Edward was conscience-smitten, that is certain, as he looked down on mother and child, and suffered horrible pangs and yearnings of tender love for that innocent girl he had dealt with so treacherously. Then and there he might have committed and compromised himself, might have manfully redeemed his honour, had not at that moment the door opened and his parent appeared. All the poms and vanities of this wicked world seemed to enter with him. Edward hastily made his escape. Mrs. Hartley whispered, her face to her daughter's; the young lady, rising from her knees, confronted her step-father with a steadfast pale face for a moment, and then the two women quitted the room.

Hartley, of Hartley Hall, his brow bound with victorious wreaths, was again left alone with his glory.

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

BUT now developed itself the worst and wretchedest mischief that our travelled young gentleman had yet done at the Family Seat.

For, after all, the poor young lady's desperate anguish was entirely caused by a single word in her lover's reply to her mother's appeal. She neither saw, heard, nor understood anything worse (thought nothing *could* be worse) than the simple announcement of his approaching departure, of their for-ever separation. All the selfishness, treachery, cowardice, cruelty, that his words also revealed (and to her mother so revoltingly), Helen, in her blind, childish faith, utterly missed; and now utterly refused to see, hear, or understand at her weeping mother's instigation.

Frantically, angrily refused, with indignant surprise and scorn, with sharp, wicked, wild words, poor agonized child—the first hard thoughts or words that ever left her heart and lips motherward in all her life!

Mrs. Hartley had a much quicker temper than her girl, who was usually very mild, gentle, not at all easily moved to anger in word or demeanour, but whose passions were deeper and stronger. But now the mother sat there so patient, so silently sorrowful!—while her child walked restlessly up and down the room, passionately upbraiding her, with eyes flashing through the tears that rolled down her rose-flushed cheeks, with a voice half strangled by sobs.

"No," cried she, "I shall never love you again as I did, mamma! and all your great love for me must have been only pretence after all! Now that I *want* it, now that I *want* sympathy and comfort, you fail me. You try to make me more miserable; you try to rob me of all I have left

—the recollection of his love ! And why did you pretend to care for him too, only to turn against him, calumniating him, and try to turn me against him in his grief ? But you cannot—cannot—cannot do that ! You only turn my heart from yourself, and make me love him all the more—all the more ! Ungenerous ! to wrest his own words against him ! when he only thought of me, and for my sake thought it right to sacrifice—to renounce ”—(there her voice broke)—“ when *he*, too, could hardly speak for his grief and pain. For he does love me, he does love me ! I believe him, him, him, not you—cruel that you are ! He is not selfish, and mercenary, and unprincipled ; he is great, and noble, and true ! And I love him—I love him—and I shall never love you again,—not as I did.” She stopped, at last, choking with sobs.

Bitter, bitter words ! But the poor mother washed away their undutifulness, their ingratitude, with her own tears, and only went and put her arms round her cruel girl, and tried to draw her flushed wet face down on her pitiful bosom, saying brokenly, tenderly, humbly,—

“ My Helen, my Helen, don’t cast off your mother ! Love him—love him best, if you will, if you must !—I won’t, I don’t complain. But oh, come, dear, come to me for comfort. Oh, my pet, my girl, my all ! ”

At first the girl struggled and writhed away from the fond arms ; but, gradually ceasing to do so, gave way to softer emotions ; and so the two women ended by crying very lovingly together, locked in one another’s arms. But the evil seed had taken root.

Later in the day, as Helen was passing Edward’s door, to go down-stairs, he opened it swiftly and noiselessly, and standing there, dressed for dinner, his overcoat on his arm, put his finger on his lip, and held out a little note. Helen shut her hand on it almost instinctively, and in an instant the door was again closed.

She ran back to her own room, palpitating, flushed, afraid she knew not why, and unfolded the tiny missive crushed in her palm. Her first love-letter !

"My darling, I must speak to you once more. Go down to the Cliff-seat, after dinner. They will suppose me to be dining at Broadleigh. Don't refuse me. Don't hate me, my sweetest. Light a taper, and burn this *directly*.

"E. H."

It was really her first assignation, because now first was she cognizant of mystery and intrigue in her love. Yesterday, she would have run to her mother with this note, and not have had the least idea that Edward could mean to exclude *her* from their confidence. But now the girl's heart was, as she had too ruthlessly said in her haste and resentment, turned from her parent. This fatal passion had mastered heart and mind. She resented, as she loved, rashly and unduly. She looked on her mother as Edward's enemy—therefore her own—in this matter.

Perhaps she had somewhat modified this bitter feeling of estrangement, since she had suffered Mrs. Hartley to kiss her and cry with her; and now rather regarded her as misled and misjudging, than wantonly unjust and cruel. But, at all events, she was implacable enough to resolve on obeying her lover, deceiving her mother, and on going to the Cliff-seat.

When Edward Hartley embraced his Helen there, that summer evening, you would hardly guess what object our young gentleman carried in the waistcoat to which he clasped her.

A pocket-pistol? A wedding-ring? A special licence? Nothing of the sort.

A note from Helen's mother, acknowledging the written promise he had given, and for which she had, in writing, implored him—that he would not seek her daughter again; would not at present see her again; would not return from Broadleigh, but depart thence for London, or elsewhere, next morning, making no sign. He wrote the required promise, and she sent him her thanks, and almost her blessing, poor mother, in two or

three touching lines. He received both these notes while he was dressing to go to Broadleigh, and used the blank half of the last for that love-letter you have seen, thrusting the remaining portion in his pocket; and so came with it there, three or four hours later, to keep his assignation with Louisa's child.

Hail to thee, great God of Christendom! Source inexhaustible of happiness, honour, and credit! Creative genius of arms, diplomacy, law, and love! Protecting power of society! Saving Providence of Respectable Sinners! Hail to thee, Almighty Lie!

CHAPTER VIII.

TELEMACHUS.

You may remember that Mr. Edward Hartley was once a lying little boy. Did he break a window with his ball at that early period of his career, he quickly perceived that he was quite sure to be punished for telling the truth, but not quite sure if he invented a falsehood, and denied it. The shrewd imp went on improving his experience, and rapidly taught himself the fatal lesson, that he might occasionally purchase pleasure as well as immunity by the same process. Therefore, the young Sybarite lied on every favourable opportunity: *cela va sans dire*. When one lie, or fifty, could obtain him forbidden joys, he never grudged the price, even then. He respected truth more, now, recognizing the beauty of honour and good faith between man and man; but in love affairs he considered lying not only fair, but even an agreeable exercise of the brain in conjunction with the heart. He was just now very much in love with Helen; he desired above all things to enjoy her society; he really could not at present enjoy himself without it; this enjoyment, there-

fore, had become a necessity, to secure which it seemed expedient to lie. Of course he lied.

And the petty plotting, the skilful cheater, the father and mother triumphantly tricked, were but ingredients that heightened the flavour of his dainty dish.

He knew that his Helen's inconvenient artlessness would no longer send her to her only friend, confidante, and protector. For Mrs. Hartley, in the agitated entreaty she had left her weeping daughter, and humbled herself to address to him, had, with imprudent candour, spoken of Helen's resentment; her child estranged—her child's heart closed against her.

And now, for three more summer weeks, the lovers snatched their fearful joy, meeting clandestinely in retired lanes and woods, miles away.

Edward was "supposed" to be visiting a friend in London, but in reality was lodging in an out-of-the-way village, six miles off.

More love-letters, too—a clandestine correspondence, carried on cunningly.

Now and then small parcels were delivered to Helen, "supposed" to contain lace from a lace-making girl she employed in that village. To any persons more perceptive and less confiding than her step-father and her mother, Helen's secret must speedily have been betrayed, however, by her frequent fits of far from mournful pre-occupation, her obstinately solitary walks and pony-rides, and by her quick flush and trouble as often as she received these extremely unmeaning packets of lace, which she never opened on the spot, or displayed the contents of.

But Louisa would almost as soon have suspected her Helen of murder as of duplicity, and only cried much, poor lady, over that continued resentment which separated them, heaping tendernesses on her daughter, honouring her heroic fortitude, and fight with sorrow; and humouring her fancy for solitary rides and rambles.

As for Hartley, of Hartley Hall, nothing blinds a man like an absurd self-importance. He had had the

power to quash a domestic rebellion, and he had quashed it—of course.

So father and mother are triumphantly tricked. It is all fair, our young gentleman thinks. As for the former, what better has he ever deserved at his hands? And as for the latter—well, she has certainly denied him her daughter for a plaything, grudged him her pet—her pride, her one ewe-lamb.

But Helen herself—is that all fair, too? What ill turn has she done him that deserves so evil a one at his hands? Ah, what has she denied or grudged him that he has ever yet asked of her?

But he has an answer quite ready for himself. He tells himself he has not tricked *her*. No. He has never breathed a syllable to her—no, not in the most effusive moments of his passion, implying marriage or marriage engagement. He applies this salve to his conscience pretty often, curiously transmogrifying his shame into his honour, with ingenuity amounting to moral thimblery.

Besides, he goes on to say to himself, what harm does he do Helen? He would not harm her for the world! The sweet child is at present divinely happy in his presence and his love.

Doubtless she will have to pay a few tears for these weeks of stolen blissfulness, but at her age such tears are but ooings—anguish has had no time to cut deep to the water-springs.

At some future day she will look back, painlessly sighing and smiling to these happy summer hours, when she wandered through the green lanes hand-in-hand with him, his truant playfellow.

But one contingency our young man of the world overlooked. He remembered Helen's tender age apparently to the toughening of his own conscience, but he forgot the companion fact of his own youth. And thus his twenty-two years began presently, quite unexpectedly, very embarrassingly, to rebel against his grey-headed prudence. His ardent passion, like a vigorous budding

vine, pushed strong red shoots and twigs and leaves and blossoms, that defied the untimely frosts of his heart, and now ripened apace to fruitage.

In other words, Edward's courage ebbed from him day by day. The question of departure and separation (the dream dreamed, the Idyl sung through) became no longer one of cruelty to Helen, so glibly disposed of by moral thimblery. He began, to his consternation, to perceive that it involved an agonizing operation to be inflicted on himself. There stood Telemachus at the very brink of the saving precipice, strongly pushed by worldly prudence, his Mentor—and still that Calypso-passion held him back, trembling, and shuddering, from the verge. It was not alarm for his beautiful Helen that troubled his repose, and aroused his tenderest anxiety, but for a nearer one still, and a dearer one yet, than all other—for his Helen's lover!

For it was not now a question of Gretchen, Coralie, or Tita—costly young persons, whose price had, however, fallen short of an inheritance. He had now to do with an English girl, protected by her position in society; a maiden pure as light, and modest as the Poet's violet by a mossy stone. *This* violet he dared not lightly pluck, inhale its fragrance for a moment, and, passing on his way, fling careless into the wayside ditch. This violet he must wear on his breast, in the sight of all men, or leave it where it grew. He could marry, or desert, this English maiden; but there was no pleasant by-lane where they could build a bower, between the high-roads of "I will," and "Adieu."

So our young gentleman puts his Helen into one scale, and the Family Estate into another, and weighs, and weighs—

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE RASPBERRY BUSHES.

MISS PIPPIN is a beautiful flounced young person, holding the position of own maid to Mrs. Hartley. She exchanges patterns and vows of friendship with Miss Flitter, another beautiful and flounced young person, own maid to Lady Jane Baldwin.

One evening, Miss Flitter, having arranged her patroness for a banquet at a neighbouring magnate's, and seen the family off in its dingy old red-handed coach, wraps a mantle around her graceful form, and comes tripping across the two parks, to devote an hour to friendship and conversation in the society of her Lydia—(Lydia is Miss Pippin). The fact is, the young woman has a bran-new bit of gossip to carry, which she is naturally eager and proud to display, unfolding it gradually to gaping admirers, like a costly ribbon, lace, or shawl.

Now, honest Elizabeth Tatt, who has been Miss Ashton's personal attendant since the young lady has outgrown a nurse, chances this evening to walk up the fruit-gardens, picking a little fruit for Miss Helen's supper. She comes upon Miss Flitter in all her glory, unfolding this choice gossip-web for the delectation of Miss Pippin, and a footman or two, who attend the young persons in their evening stroll among the raspberry bushes. Something Tatt hears as she picks fruit unseen in a neighbouring raspberry bed—a *name*, probably, among the sibilation of Laws, Goodness-graciously, and Well-I-nevers, that makes her stay in hiding to listen—incredulous, indignant, frightened. Then her comely red cheek turns pale; trembling she goes away, softly, without a word—for she cannot articulate one, even to bid them hold their tongues, for shame—as she longs to do. The poor soul walks quite away, and, get-

ting to some distance, sits down on a garden seat among the elm-trees, near the shrubbery gate. She is only faithful and affectionate, she is not at all clever, poor Tatt, and she is sorely perplexed by her anxious desire and effort to take counsel with herself. What is she to do? To whom shall she speak? Mother or child?

You will guess, perhaps, what she has heard: what gossip-web it was that those charming flounced young persons were huddling together to unfold and ejaculate over, putting in this light and that, for the gratification of sniggering John and Thomas, among the raspberry bushes. You guess that it was the lovers' secret.

While poor good Tatt is sitting there half stupid with trying to think, it is growing darker and darker.

And Helen is out; has been out ever since two o'clock; went out on foot then, all alone. Mr. and Mrs. Hartley are dining at the neighbouring magnate's also, and Helen, never going to dinner parties when she can help it, dined at luncheon time. Poor Tatt is growing very chilly, and is crying. She is so fond of her young mistress, so attached to her elder one—the poor mother, to whom her child is all!

"She'll just drop down dead," Tatt says to herself, "if any harm comes to Miss Helen. And, bless the dear, she's but a babby in Master Edward's hands. He's a bad fellow that there, and I never could abide the eyes of 'un. Handsome indeed! he've behaved handsome, haven't he? I should like to spile his beauty, I should!"

At this moment a young step comes light and quick along the shrubbery path; the wicket swings, and Helen runs through, and past, never seeing Tatt in her dark gown, sitting in the dark among the trees. So swiftly she runs that the honest creature can only hurry after her, calling—"Miss Helen—Oh, Miss Helen!" in vain. For the girl seems not to hear her, hastens on, darts into the house, up-stairs, along passages, to her own room; closes the door after her, and bolts it audibly. But as she put her foot on the first step of the stairs her light

shawl slipped from one arm, and hastily drawing it over her shoulder she half-turned her face to Tatt, just entering behind her. The light of the hall lamps showed it streaming with tears.

Nurse follows, but so slowly ! the excellent woman has such bad corns, and her immense prunella shoes plod wearily after the child's little arched foot. When she comes to the bedroom door she stops a moment and listens anxiously. She hears sounds that bring the slow elderly tears down her wholesome red cheeks—moans, sobs, tearing sighs, inarticulate low exclamations.

“Miss Helen!—Miss Helen ! There's a dear, there's a dear, do'ee let me in !”

There is no sort of answer or notice taken.

Tatt is afraid to draw the attention of other servants, whom she hears moving in neighbouring rooms. She dares not call or knock louder. And then, at last, all her painful laborious efforts, to decide what she ought to do, end suddenly in a resolution to go straight to Helen's mother the moment she returns ; and this resolution quiets her, as a resolution of any sort is apt to quiet perturbed spirits.

When Mrs. Hartley came home, and went up to her dressing-room, Tatt waited till Miss Pippiny, having enveloped her mistress in a dressing-gown, wriggled herself off, and then knocked at the door. Mrs. Hartley was standing up, on the point of going to her daughter's room, surprised not to have seen her as usual, the first thing on re-entering the house. Tatt's face was enough to frighten her.

“Helen !” she gasped, “my Helen!—nurse, nurse, for God's sake !”

Then Tatt told her all she knew, all she had heard.

The mother flamed up, at first.

“My Helen meet her lover clandestinely in lanes and woods alone ! My Helen the talk of servants' halls ! My modest, innocent child ! Shame upon them ! Above all—my Helen deceive me ? My Helen plot and lie to cheat me ? Never !—never !—false, false !”

But when conviction was forced upon her—ah! then the poor mother let fall her head on her servant's shoulder, and sobbed that her heart was broken.

Faithful Elizabeth could only comfort her now, just as she did all those years ago, by encouraging her (with fondling words) to cry, and by crying with her.

But presently Mrs. Hartley lifted up her face, almost haggard, wild, and stern.

"Thank you, dear Elizabeth," said she. "I have but one thing to do, and I must do it. Now, this night—this moment. Thank you, dear Elizabeth!" said she, again, and kissed her faithful servant's cheek, wet with the tears of both.

CHAPTER X.

MR. HARTLEY HAS AN INSPIRATION.

MRS. HARTLEY went down-stairs with a hurrying foot and a pale face, and opening the door of her husband's study, stood before him.

He was still reading some letters that had been given him when he came home. He looked up, and his cold evil look did not silence her; it was the beating of her own agonized heart that stopped voice and breath for a moment. But she would almost have uttered her anguish with those poor hungry mother's eyes, to any but him.

"*My daughter!*" said she at last, in a strange tone. "You must save her. You must, you MUST!"

The *mal'occhio* had a sort of cowardly shrinking in it, for the respectable gentleman really thought his wife had suddenly gone mad.

"Have you lost your senses, ma'am?" said he. "What is the matter? and what have I to do with your daughter?"

"To do with her—to do with her! But for you—for you—Oh, what use——" said she, breaking off.

She made a great effort, and controlled herself.

Then she began again, and steadily, with no more passionate outbreaks, told her husband all, as she had just heard it from Tatt.

Told him that two or three gay young people—children of county neighbours, and acquaintances of their own—riding through the unfrequented coppices about three miles off, that afternoon, had come on Edward, his son, "supposed" to be in London, and Helen, seated on a felled trunk, in the attitude of lovers, his arm round her waist. That the riding party had come on them noiselessly, at a turn of the grass-alley, which had muffled the horses' hoofs. Edward had perceived them too late to escape, too suddenly to disguise his confusion, when recognised with exclamations of surprise. As for Helen, losing all presence of mind, she had fled away among the trees, and disappeared; but, alas! quite too late to escape recognition.

That a groom bringing up the rear had also seen the lovers as they sat there; and this lad had brought the piece of gossip straight to the servants' hall at Broadleigh, along with a message he chanced to be charged with to Sir James. And Lady Jane Baldwin's maid had immediately darted away with the story to Pippiny and the footmen at Hartley Hall.

"Tatt heard her diverting them with it, and came as soon as I returned, and told me," ended the poor mother, —clenching her hands in a sort of agony, as they hung down on either side,—

She had forced herself to stand quietly before him and tell it all, without any kind of comment that might delay or obscure the facts; and then, after a momentary tearless pause, she added:

"You must save her, Mr. Hartley."

"And how, ma'am?"

"You must save her, I tell you!"

He was veritably perplexed, and sorely vexed. He

had ever hugged himself in his immaculate respectability—good repute he called it; and although he had had not the least objection to Helen's dying of a broken heart, of hopeless love for his son, he had wished and intended his little vendetta to be managed "respectably." All this scandal and gossip was the last state of things he desired or had anticipated. People would cry shame not only on the young man, but perhaps on the young man's father, if evil tongues wagged at the orphan girl under his roof. Hartley, of Hartley Hall, was not wise, or good, or a gentleman, but "*qu'en dira-t-on?*" sometimes helps such a one as him, at a pinch, to behave as if all three; and, moreover, self-love can now and then light up the farthing twinkle of a cunning thought to guide a fool out of a scrape.

He would not yield up his vendetta, and own himself to himself, circumvented by this insolent girl: he would not reward rank rebellion, and disobedience, and duplicity, by sanctioning the engagement he had forbidden. He would not see in that hateful chit the future mistress of the Family Seat. He would not see those two women triumphant, whom he had promised himself to conquer and crush. His *son*!—he would sacrifice fifty sons, rather. Let his son take the consequence of deceiving him, and of involving himself with his enemies. He looked up, and his face had the complacent look of a man who has searched for and found the thing he wanted.

"Mrs. Hartley," said he, in his best moral-tale manner, "I'm shocked: I'm not surprised. Such art, such contempt of decorum in so young a person as your daughter, is—is appalling! But in her case it's not at all wonderful. My son, brought up with the principles that my venerated mother and myself laboured to instil, never could have so far forgotten his duty to Me, except under extraordinary evil influence——"

Mrs. Hartley, listening impatiently so far, interrupted him. Not to defend her seventeen-year-old child against that monstrous imputation of being the tempter, while the innocent young man of the world yielded to her

blandishments, more sinned against than sinning—she could spare no time or thought for the stupid insult.

“Well?” said she, abruptly.

“Madam,” rejoined her husband with the dignity of an owl, “I was expressing my sentiments.”

“Yes,” said she, “but what will you *do*?”

She did not mean to be contemptuous, but she could not stay now to disguise her impatient, bitter scorn.

“I was about to say, if you had had the politeness to wait till I concluded, that I will think the matter over.”

“What?”

“I repeat, I must take time to consider it, and I shall probably shortly acquaint you with the measures I shall have decided on adopting in this disgraceful affair.”

She stared at him; eager, utterly unsatisfied, but thinking rapidly and passionately as she stared, almost without seeing him.

“Is that all?”

“All—yes: it is all I have to say on the subject to-night. There can be no occasion for haste. I take for granted the young lady has returned from her rambles by this time, and is sleeping off her fatigues.”

Mrs. Hartley did not hear him, probably: she went away upstairs, with the same hurrying foot and pale face, and going to her daughter’s door knocked at it, gently, gently calling her by her name.

After a moment’s pause, Helen opened the door. She seemed to have just begun to undress, and to have tried to compose herself; but her face had the plain signs of recent weeping on it, though she was weeping no longer. But when she met her mother’s look, she knew that her “disgrace” (so to herself she kept calling it and thought it) had already come home. Pride, and grief, and shame overwhelmed the girl; passionate crying had exhausted her—she turned, tottered, and fell, fainting for the first time in her life. Her mother broke her fall, and, sinking on the floor beside her, called to Tatt, whom she had passed in the passage, and knew to be at hand. They

lifted the poor child on the bed, and soon revived her. She turned away her face when she recovered consciousness, but was too prostrated to repel them, or to resist while they undressed her. They said not a word to her, except of the tenderest endearment or homely fondling; and often the mother's lips were pressed on the round soft arm, or the hair that she folded away from the flushed, averted cheek.

And when Helen was in bed her mother laid herself on the coverlet beside her, and drew the girl's head on her shoulder. Sleep, always kind as a mother to the young, tenderly calmed the poor child's pulses, and Helen soon slumbered profoundly.

But Mrs. Hartley's grief was sleepless. And all night, and even past the summer dawn, she wept most bitter, silent tears, while her daughter slept folded in her arms. In her broken-hearted remorse she reproached herself, and only herself, for all this evil that had come to pass. She believed that Mr. Hartley, for his own sake, and in his worship of Hartley respectability, now intended ungraciously to sanction the engagement and marriage of their children. She forced herself to stifle the sob, the groan of agonized maternal pride and love, at the thought of this grudging consent coming now as a boon to be thankful for! Her Helen, whom she would have grudged as too costly a gift to any man on earth! Her Helen to be scornfully taken, as a necessary evil, for decorum's sake, and as a bad bargain! At best, for pity's sake! And then, *after*! What kind of husband should this man make, dead (as she now saw him) to true honour and true tenderness? This young man, old and cold already in worldliness—

“To give thee up to him! Oh, my girl, my girl!” (inwardly moaned her mother); “whose innocence he could practise on, whose truth he could warp, whose beautiful precious love he could win for a pastime, and sordidly weigh, as he did, against Dross.”

For so poor Louisa, you will observe, still disparagingly

called such matters as a good income, and a Family Seat—just as she did when she was sixteen, and trilled Boscche's songs to her first and only love. And this in the face of having by no means in her second espousals reduced to practice the sublime sentiments which pervade those melodies. However, I believe she had come to despise money much more really, and less ignorantly, by this time. Perhaps she had found her rich wedding-cake very soon palling on her palate: perhaps impossible dinners of herbs and love had tasted deliciously in imagination, compared to her actual stalled ox and hatred therewith.

The summer day had broken, when Mrs. Hartley at last fell asleep, utterly exhausted by that bitter watch of grief. She was, however, aware, without power even to think about it, that Helen awoke, and softly withdrew herself from her arm. Then she dozed off. Then she was suddenly conscious again, and knew that her daughter's lips had touched her cheek—lightly, but the mother felt the sweetness to her very soul. Did she sleep again, or was it instantly, as it seemed, that she started up awake, wide awake, wild with a sudden undefined terror? Was it a dream, or wonderful maternal instinct? There hardly needed that glance round the room—she had *felt* that Helen was gone! Oh! surely but a moment gone! The sweetness of her kiss seems yet on her cheek.

Gone! gone, and whither? She sprang up, breathless and shaking with that fear, and, in catching at some support, suddenly perceived a morsel of paper on her arm, thrust under the bracelet of Helen's hair she almost always wore—and you know she had but partly undressed the night before. She snatched out the paper—scrawled in pencil, incoherent, illegible, useless to all but that divine intuition of the mother's heart.

"I could not bear to see anybody—Mr. Hartley would be so cruel after this. Darling mamma, I do love you dearly—Darling mamma, forget what I said once. I was so wicked; I didn't mean it. Do be comforted. I know he will be kind to me. Indeed, he is good—indeed he is. He does not mind giving all up for me—it was only for

my sake. I will write very, very soon; be comforted, my own darling mamma; I will always be your loving child—HELEN ASHTON."

Gone! gone to him!

CHAPTER XI.

A BEREAVED FATHER.

WHEN Mrs. Hartley comprehended that her vague fear was realized, and that her daughter had rashly forsaken home and mother, to take refuge with her lover, she uttered a despairing cry, that was not loud, but exceeding bitter. Then, blindly, impulsively, she ran out of the room, downstairs, straight out at the hall-door (just thrown wide by the servants), into the silent brightness of the park, lying broad and fair in the dewy summer morning. There she stopped short, gazing distractedly about, and huskily calling on Helen's name. No reply, no sound—but of a bird that sang somewhere among the still greenness. She darted to the shrubbery gate, which was open—perhaps the child's hand had left it so, in her cruel haste. There was a step behind; Mrs. Hartley turned quickly, with a desperate hope. It was but a gardener's boy, passing to the lawn, his scythe on his shoulder.

"Did you—did you see Miss Ashton?"

The clownish lad stared at the poor lady as if she had been a monster; and indeed she was a very different apparition from that dainty, awful, little empress, the Madam, as hitherto manifested to him. Dishevelled, pale as death, heavy-eyed, wild—half-dazed, he thought, in the rumpled white dressing-gown she had worn all night, lying on the outside of the bed with her daughter in her arms.

But he contrived to answer in his loutish utterance, thick and slab—

"Iss sure, Missus, I see Miss Helen hurning down Mill-lane, as I com'th up'long——"

"When, when?"

"As I com'th up'long tu work, just tu fower o'clock. It be gone six now."

Two hours! two hours since the child left that last kiss on her face, which she seemed to feel as she awoke. Seemed to feel now! She was incredulous, or tried to be.

"You must mistake, Ben, it can't be so long ago as that."

"Please, Missus, it *be*," persisted the youth, eager with conscious rectitude, always staring, and tumbling out his words like potatoes out of a sack; "as I comth up Mill-lane, hur war hurnin' downlong, and please, Missus, as I turnth and lookth, cos hur war hurnin' so, the young gen'leman he met she, and the church clock he strook fower."

Mrs. Hartley turned away, knitting her fingers together, in a convulsion of anguish and pain. It was done premeditatedly, then. It had all been arranged between them overnight. And Helen had deliberately deceived her, in flying from her mother's arms to this bad man. Yes, bad, lying, selfish, cruel! If he had loved her girl truly, would he have persuaded the child to deceive her mother?—her mother who was never harsh, never hard on her. "God knows I have been a *fond* mother at least! Oh, how could she, could she, could she——"

With this piteous questioning cry the poor lady sank down on the bench under the elms, where the girl's nurse had sat and wept for her the night before.

"Oh, my Helen! what have you done!" sobbed the mother, already forgetting her own wrongs. "But oh, all my fault, my fault! wretched, unworthy mother that I am! She had but me, and how have I guarded her! Your dear heart had come back to me, my child—but too late, too late! Oh God, pity; God, help my poor child!"

She presently went indoors, and met Mr. Hartley—

who was a very early riser, though he never did anything in particular with his time, just coming down-stairs. He looked shocked and astonished at her strange appearance and unpresentable toilette. He himself was in apple-pie order; shaven to scarification, sleek, starched, summer dressing-gowned (a hideous chintz, but all prim), the regulation British gentleman—justly proud that he was never unfit to be seen. He was going to make some dignified expostulation or inquiry, but his wife opened the door of his study, and by a grave gesture gave him to understand she intended to speak with him there. When they had entered and were shut in, she turned round abruptly, and said without any preface:

“My daughter is gone from me with your son. She went this morning, and left this note to tell me she was gone, and why.”

She had held the morsel of paper crushed in the palm of her hand ever since she had read it; but she did not offer to show it to her husband, nor did she mean to let him, nor any one in the world, touch it. It belonged to her alone. It was her Helen's hand, written while she was still hers, and not the man's who had stolen her. Helen Ashton wrote it—Helen *Ashton*, who would never write to her mother again. Mr. Hartley stood silent, but his wife saw a kind of satisfied sneer creep into his face.

“You are not surprised, you expected this, you counted on it,” said she, with sudden conviction, and a momentary (only a momentary) light of anger and indignation in her poor swollen eyes.

She was right: had rightly interpreted the complacent expression of a man who glories in his own sagacity. He had certainly anticipated this way of escape out of his dilemma, as almost sure to open to him in the course of twenty-four hours. For this reason he deferred taking any steps in the matter until the rash young couple had had time to play into his hands. He would give them rope enough until they had noosed themselves to his wish. He had guessed, with the sharpened instinct of

self-preservation, what their impulse would be, while still excited and overwhelmed by the discovery which had suddenly brought all eyes on them, and set all tongues wagging about their clandestine loves. He had guessed that this impulse would be to break away from the immediate and intolerable mortifications which must ensue; and that his son, young man of the world as he was, would feel that he had committed himself, as well as Helen, too deeply to disappear without her, at this crisis. Mr. Hartley did not altogether lose sight of the possibility that the young man might be urged by the passion of love as well as by a very worldly sentiment of honour, not to forsake the beautiful young girl he had compromised. But he certainly considered that he might have successfully resisted the one if it had not been backed by the other. However, thanks to his own sagacity, here was he, himself, no longer in a false position, but comfortably safe in his respectability, with nothing to do and to say but to stick to the high moral line, as usual. He did not mind being called severe. The spotless decorum of his own life and conversation should justify him in any amount of stern inflexibility towards those disreputable and rebellious young people. Folks might invent their own history of the affair—might wonder, if they pleased, at his disapproval of the match, which had caused it to be a stolen one. To that gossip he was loftily indifferent. He had got both his vendetta and his respectability safe, and that insolent girl had not triumphed. She would be his son's wife, not his heir's; she would not marry him with a victorious peal of the parish bells; she would never be queen-consort on the family throne. He met his wife's abrupt accusation with the tone and look of furious vindictive malice, at last let loose; and with that sterling eloquence peculiar to some fine old English gentlemen when excited.

"I cannot say I am surprised, Mrs. Hartley. Being a reasonable being, how can I be? The system on which you have thought proper to bring up your daughter has resulted in ruin and disgrace; of course it

has ; and I have to thank you and your modest daughter for the loss of My son. Yes, ma'am, the legal death to me of my only son. Miss Ashton has thought proper to elope with a certain Mr. Edward Hartley, who is an utter stranger to me. An utter stranger. You were all duly warned. You have all chosen to defy me, and must take the consequences. Instant submission, unqualified submission, *might* have effected something—though it was a match I conscientiously disapproved. Of course, this open defiance of decency, this indelicate, and scandalous, and disgraceful, and—and—in short, this abominable proceeding, shuts the doors of Hartley Hall on them for ever ! For ever, ma'am !”

His malignity was at once balked and stimulated by the apathetic demeanour of his wife.

“ The ladies of this Family do not elope, ma'am. They have had a foolish old-fashioned prejudice in favour of propriety, and of decency, and of respectability. They have hitherto been *song tarsh* !—(your genuine fine old English gentleman is seldom on speaking terms with foreign languages)—One nameless exception understood, *song tarsh*, ma'am ; and no mistress of Hartley Hall shall be otherwise, as far as I am still in a condition to prevent it. I owe this reparation to Myself, and to the memory of my departed mother, and the honour of the Family I have the honour to represent. No one will be surprised at what has occurred : no one *can* be surprised. You have trained up your daughter in the way she has gone. She has been a very apt pupil—that is all ! The particular circumstances of your first marriage have only to be recalled to leave no room for surprise in any rational mind. No one could have expected *you* to inculcate the rigid principles of *my* Family.”

All this brutality, all this wicked wretched spite, fell meaningless on the ear of the bereaved mother. She heard her husband speaking, and, with her habitual courtesy, waited till the sound of his voice ceased : then she went silently away. She went upstairs drearily, mechanically, and into her daughter's room. But when

she saw that empty, deserted chamber, the recent traces and tokens of her girl there, the bed still impressed for the last time by that form her eyes must hunger after in vain, she seemed to realize the anguish that had half bewildered her; the pangs of a worse maternal travail seemed to rend her; she uttered piercing hysterical shrieks, and fell on the floor, quite beaten and conquered by her great agony.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRY OF CONSCIENCE.

Two or three maids came running, but Elizabeth Tatt was foremost, and, entering in, shut and bolted the door on the very nose of the indignant Miss Pippiny. Shut and bolted it when she saw the sorrowful sight within. Her mistress, in a wild paroxysm of tears, and sobs, and cries, lay partly on the floor, partly on the bed, her arms stretched out over the sheet to which her face was pressed. Tatt comprehended in a moment what had happened. She trembled very much, and sat down, staring at her poor mistress with eyes running over. At last she knelt down by her, and tried to soothe her by a homely fond word or two of comfort and simple piety. But the good creature was sobbing herself for the darling of their hearts who had left them to grieve. When she found the very violence of the mother's agony was at last exhausting her into quietness, she lifted her on the bed, as she had lifted Helen the night before, and gently undressed her, as they had both undressed the fainting girl. After a time Mrs. Hartley slept, or seemed to sleep; and Tatt, partly closing the shutters across the open window, sat down and cried softly for the best part of an hour. But Mrs. Hartley was not asleep even now. Bodily prostration kept her still, and

weighed down her hot eyelids; nevertheless her heart and soul were full of new and strange and thick-coming thoughts, that had crowded in the train of her sorrow.

For the first time for many years she thought of her father *as* her father. Had she made him suffer any portion of what she was suffering now, when she left him as her only child had now left her? She was *his* only child also: his petted, spoiled, ungrateful child. He had crossed her love, that love of which she could not repent, but his own fatherly tenderness had deserved more than she gave. Perhaps—if she had waited—she might have won, had she not defied. Putting this question aside, the thought recurred again and again, the cry of conscience—had she made him suffer as she was suffering now; in kind, if not in degree, and as a worldly man might? Strange pity rose in her heart, sharp pangs of self-reproach, significant whispers of just retribution, confession, humiliation, contrition, prayer—all these phases of feeling melted into each other, and combined into that last, like a procession of chemical changes of colour into colourless light.

When Tatt by-and-by went and peeped at her, hoping from her stillness to find the poor lady in a refreshing slumber, she put out her hand to the good soul, the faithful friend of so many years, and whispered humbly:

“Elizabeth, I am going to write to my father.” And by-and-by she rose up and did it.

After that she began to calculate how soon she should receive the promised letter from Helen Hartley, and many an hour passed in sorrowful yearning for that poor comfort. It is remarkable that, unprincipled as she believed the man to be at whose mercy her daughter was, she never expected less than a worldly sort of honour at his hands. If the dark doubt once came, it could hardly be said to have fully presented itself.

“He would not dare!” said she; and it vanished at one thought of Helen, like a lion “that will flee from a maid in the pride of her purity.”

She was right: he would not have dared. He took

the young girl to an elderly lady in London, who was the mother of one of his German friends, and who accompanied Helen to the church in which she was married. Still, after that first letter arrived, the mother became much more still and composed; only occupying herself incessantly about her girl in some way or other—in putting up her clothes, and a score of tender motherly tokens with them. In arranging her child's money matters, with a lawyer's help, as well for her as might be under the circumstances. In writing to her brother-in-law, Montague Ashton: in writing to her daughter many more letters than she posted. "She won't want my letters *yet*," said she, tearing many a page of wasted fond words. In writing one letter, one only, to her child's husband.

"Be good to your wife," she wrote; "make my daughter happy, and you will be my dear son. Be good, and very, very tender to your Helen" (she had written "my," and altered it), "and her mother will thank you and bless you."

It was all she could yet say to the man who had stolen her child out of her arms so lately. And she wrote it because Helen asked it, Helen begged her to forgive dear Edward, and to send him a word of kindness, telling him so, because Helen said she could not be quite happy without that.

Then came the miserable news of a projected foreign residence, as more economical, and more agreeable to Edward; and at first the mother could hardly hold herself back in her agonized yearning to see her child's face, to have her on her heart once more. But she denied herself, perhaps overstrained her strong sincere desire to put self out of the question, to think and act for Helen solely, and not to exasperate Edward's father by openly separating herself from him in this sad matter, by openly manifesting her indifference to his opinion and displeasure. "And she does not want me yet," she told herself, with a tender bitterness in her heart. She made up her mind she would let her go without seeking

to see her even once again. To let her go with the husband she had chosen, with her mother's cheerful written words of blessing, so happy, in her new life and love, as to be unconscious of that agony of grief and supplication for her in the home she had deserted.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN DREWE.

AN August evening on the banks of the Serpentine. Two young men stand watching the last red streak of sunset over the woods towards Bayswater. Lower down, ten thousand boys, more or less, splashing about in the water, black against the quicksilver-looking liquid; a confused cry and murmur come up from them: a crippled vender of sweetmeats sweeps by with a basket on his arm, uttering his monotonous note.

"So now that I've told you my story, since we parted at Munich," says the younger man, "I propose that you in your turn unbosom yourself."

There is very little real interest or sympathy in his tone; and his old acquaintance perceives the deficiency in a moment. He is a great square, shaggy-headed man, rather rough, shabby, and savage looking, a sort of handsome-ugly fellow; quite a contrast to the fine young gentleman at his side. These two are Edward Hartley and John Drewe. The latter, at twenty-seven, looks just what you would have expected the uncouth boy of fifteen to turn out.

"Well," returns he, in a devil-may-care manner, but a tone in which, to a less indifferent observer, bleeding pride would have seemed to ooze at every word. "Well, I have come back to England, after wandering up and down and going to and fro on the face of the earth; and I've been in London just fifteen weeks. I have made

no one step in what I intended, and came to London to do. I have worn out all my friends and my clothes, and have got no new ones. The little money I had is nearly eaten up by legal attempts to get more, and an attorney's teeth are in my entrails. However, you see I put on a Spartan serenity."

"Have you lost a lawsuit then?" says Edward. "By Jove!"

Edward's indifference on the subject of his old school-fellow's troubles would be manifest enough to a more obtuse person than John Drewe. But that big animal has, morally, an elephantine delicacy of grasp, and an inconvenient sensibility that pricks itself with every pin of affront he takes up. He is stung and disgusted, but he feels so lonely and weary that he does not walk away from the prosperous and self-absorbed young bridegroom, whom he has accidentally encountered this evening.

"Eight o'clock!" says Edward presently; "impossible! my watch must be wrong. What does yours say?"

"I've pawned it," returns Jack Drewe, with a grim smile.

His old acquaintance's poverty bores and revolts Edward; he secretly takes some credit to himself for asking Jack to come home with him. And Drewe secretly despises himself for accepting the invitation.

On the road Edward, whose friend's misfortunes do not materially affect his spirits, monologues away airily as they walk, all about his own affairs.

He has already told Drewe all about his runaway marriage, and now entertains him with his future projects and prospects: how he means to go abroad and live in Italy for a year or two, until old Hartley, of Hartley Hall, behaves himself—which of course he will do before long; "for if he treated me badly *qu'en dira-t-on?* and the old fellow lives in wholesome fear of Mother Grundy. Besides, I *must* have his money sooner or later, for whom in the world could he leave his respectable old Family throne to but his only son! There's nobody but me to

sit upon it, that I can see. Meanwhile, Helen has brought a little purse that will last comfortably, and she has got a nabob uncle, that seems a Trump."

By this time they have reached the door of the temporary bower of bliss, in a little street out of Piccadilly, and, entering, go up-stairs.

Candles are lighted, and Helen is reading, but jumps up to meet her husband. I am firmly convinced she intended to embrace him, but was balked by the unexpected apparition of Mr. Drewe. I find, on inquiry, that this mode of celebrating safe returns after short absences is a strictly bridal arrangement, and forms the exception to the rule among those idle habits which, we are told, are apt to become second nature.

Mrs. Edward Hartley is radiant. John Drewe has not seen her for several years, and her girlish beauty takes him by surprise, as it did Edward.

I have never described my Helen to my public, and have indeed several objections to making any formal inventory of her charms. However, in conformity with the usages of my craft, I will here sketch her with a flying crayon. At this time, and at seventeen years old, Helen Hartley has already a stately symmetrical figure, of middle height, full though fine, with large white shoulders and graceful throat; a softly oval face, crowned and shaded by a wonderful veil of deep chestnut hair, that falls on either side of her head in ample shining curls; a skin like a white geranium, brilliant with flitting blooms on the dimpled cheeks; great brown innocent eyes between their double fringe of lashes, under delicate brows and a fair half-moon of forehead; a little clear-cut nose; a rosy mouth, somewhat serious in its natural downward curves, but at this time joyous with frequent smiles; and a rounded chin.

I hope my public is satisfied. In its place I should have skipped the foregoing—having no appetite left for fancy portraiture.

Once a twelvemonth I pay my respects and shilling to the Genius of British Art enthroned in Trafalgar Square.

And then and there the heroines of all the novels of the year seem to beam on my raptured sight from a hundred canvases. I recognise them all. I recognise the marble halls in which they dwelt, among balustrades, thunder-clouds, velvet curtains, and lap-dogs. There, in her hat and feather, is Georgiana Belmont, the haughty lovely coquette, who jilted her cousin, the good young clergyman, into an early grave in the second volume, and who disappeared, as a sister of mercy at Scutari, in the third. There is Flora de Clifford, that bewildering little countess in her own right, in the very lace gown with seventeen flounces (worth at least £700), in which (and in those diamond and pearl ornaments) she appeared at her first court ball. And there is the languishing Medora Mowbray, the high-born, the reduced Medora, whose doom was to be a governess, and whose disappointment in love cost her and me so many tears, until she breathed out His name with her last sigh, in the last line of the last page.

It is useless to refer me to the catalogue, which I am aware asserts that these are all portraits of real live ladies mentioned in the Peerage and the *Morning Post*. I can see in them only the exquisite Ideals of British Art; I believe that the types of such unearthly beauty can only exist in the pages of works in three volumes, and that such lovely clothes are but dreams of millinery. In consequence, therefore, of my yearly visit to the Royal Academy, I invariably skip all the descriptions of all the heroines of all those delightful narratives with which Mr Mudie feeds my soul as fast as they come out; confident that sooner or later I shall behold those glorious creations smiling down on me from the walls of our Palace of Art at Charing Cross; and I here gratefully record my obligations to the Fancy-portrait-painters of my country, for the great saving of time which they enable a constant novel-reader to effect, at the slight pecuniary sacrifice of one shilling per annum.

CHAPTER XIV.

BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.

QUITE involuntarily, and half unconsciously, Mr. John Drewe mutters something out of Homer respecting the ox-eyed Juno, after a shy and almost stealthy stare at the beautiful young bride. Edward Hartley's quick ear catching the *sotto voce* tribute to his youthful goddess, and to his own taste, he laughs, well pleased and triumphant. His still unabated satisfaction in his love-match has, perhaps, as much to do with *qu'en dira-t-on* ? as any deed apparently unselfish that his father has ever been guilty of.

"Isn't my wife the most beautiful girl in the world ?" is his exulting question to all the old friends before whom he displays her: a self-glorification that most people mistake for the naïve utterance of youthful passion, and that causes them to say, "they never did see a fellow so much in love !"

The conversation of the two is at first chiefly carried on by Edward, who talks an immense deal, and is as charming and original and *spirituel* as he mostly appears, when his lordship does not chance to be sulky, an accident that occasionally occurs.

Helen sits looking at him and listening to him, in perfect bliss, poor child, and saying little herself. Not that she is naturally taciturn, but she is either too intensely happy to chatter, or perhaps too shy before a sort of stranger, as John Drewe has become. He also drinks his tea silently enough at first, and really looks grim enough to be quite out of keeping with this radiant young couple. They are drinking tea at dinner-time to-day, having dined early in order to go to the play.

Somebody has told Edward of a "capital new burlesque," going on nightly at the Academy Theatre.

"Not that I care much," said Edward, "for the sort of stuff our solemn Cockneys are tickled with; but my country girl here may as well have a chance of amusement. And she *can* laugh, though you wouldn't think it, to see my 'venerable Juno' to-night—the old hypocrite! Such a malicious little Tom Thumb of a laugh as it is, sometimes; I'm horribly afraid of it. Well, we were to go to the Academy this evening, but I strolled into the park, and met you, John, and came home too late. Never mind, it's for another night."

Mr. John Drewe has been growling inarticulately, and now bursts forth incontinent. He has a habit of blurting out rough expressions of unpopular sentiments, spasmodic utterances not ineloquent in their angry sensibility.

"Nothing gives me a greater contempt for Londoners," cries he, "than their taste for all the weakest, ugliest, lowest forms of Art. That men should go on and on, year after year, writing these vile burlesques on the most graceful and imaginative fairy tales, and find crowds to delight in them! These beautiful, fanciful creations, that take hold of one's very heart, and live with us from infancy up. To me those stories are as sacred as Shakspeare. I abhor to see that exquisite framework used to hang the dull drivel of our pert Cockneyism upon, and I abhor Mr. Bon Gualtier's antic irreverent mummeries and echoes of Shelley and Tennyson——"

Here he jerked away the guilty book Helen had had in her hand, and which he had taken up.

Edward laughs and claps him on the shoulder, and cries "Hear, hear!"

But his Juno listens without a smile, and with her soul in her ox-eyes.

"Oh, Edward," cried she, "it's true what he says! it's right—it's beautiful! I do hate all parodies. I feel how mean and paltry they are. Oh, yes! we won't go to hear that horrible burlesque."

Down come the corners of Edward's mouth; my lord is turning sulky. Who knows why?

"Good heavens!" John Drewe goes on, his indigna-

tion stimulated by Helen's adherence; "are we turned into a pack of jabbering monkeys and parrots, that we can do nothing but mop and mow and mime? Doesn't it look as if we were the least hopeful of all the generations, when educated crowds can delight in the vulgarest and basest buffooneries? Comic! ugh! to me they are profoundly tragic. It's enough to anger any gentleman's soul to see those low mockeries corrupting and perverting our social existence. Nothing serious, nothing earnest, nothing even really humorous will long have the least chance against puns and parodies and burlesques. There's hardly a man *now* that dares to speak out earnestly, lest some Ape should get up and turn him into a caricature."

"Bosh!" says Edward, breaking in impatiently. "I don't see what right you have to lay about you, with your club, like Morgante, calling people vermin and all manner of bad names, because they are wise enough to be merry in their own way. Only a disappointed author would abuse successful ones at that rate. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, my dear sir; and if the pudding were as nasty as you say, such a lot of people wouldn't relish it. If it doesn't agree with you let it alone, and don't exhibit your nausea in that indecent way."

At the end of which rather rough speech, Mr. Edward Hartley goes out of the room, and bangs the door after him.

Helen is in consternation. She is not yet used to see her lord in his tantrums, and she is amazed and bewildered, besides being frightened at his rudeness to their visitor, which she thinks he will certainly resent.

Horrid visions of quarrels, duels, and death make her gasp, till, glancing at John Drewe, she sees a pleasanter look on his face than she has yet beheld there.

"Never mind," says he, his broad blond face colouring, his blue eyes mild and frank; "Ned is put out too easily, but he was right, after all. I *had* no business to fret and stamp and bellow here like an excited bull, because

I think myself an unappreciated genius! It *was* envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness: I *am* a disappointed author. The worst is, that you're annoyed and frightened—You're crying! I'm a beast!"

Helen thereupon began to laugh, partly that her mind was relieved, partly at Jack Drewe's face of grim dismay.

In comes Edward again.

"You seem amused, Helen?"

"She's laughing at me," says John; "the malicious little Tom Thumb of a laugh you warned me of. I say, Edward, I was wrong, and you were right. Will that do?"

Edward cannot help accepting the frank *amende* for what was, after all, a very vague offence; but his face does not recover its agreeable serenity.

There is more talk after that, and Helen, who is dismayed at the new aspect of her god's countenance, nervously makes conversation to divert the current of it altogether, and cover his silence. She asks Drewe a number of questions about himself, and obtains a mass of information, which at the moment does not interest her in the least, and which, in truth, goes in at one ear and out at the other. But he seems to find considerable comfort in telling her his troubles, and he has plenty of them to tell. This man, rough and gruff as he seems, has a womanish longing for sympathy, and is willing and eager to believe in it when he possibly can. He tells Helen of his return to England from Germany, where he has been for six months the correspondent of an English paper. Incidentally he tells her, too, how he has got his living by odd literary jobs ever since he left Oxford; his father, the Reverend Peter, on his declining to become a clergyman, having then washed his hands of him. He tells her he gave up his employment, and came to London, to get back if he could (which he can't), some money out of which he has been cheated, and how, by that move, he is plus a lawyer's bill, and minus a salary. That he is now trying to get "on" the same

paper again, or some other, and lives by translations, and such like, for the publishers. That he once wrote a book, and published it at his own expense, which has been—not criticised, but grinned at by the *Hyæna*, *Weekly Review*, and sat upon and smothered by the heavy *Trimonthlies*. Then he bursts out, as if the pent-up labouring soul of the man would have vent:—

“From day to day I live only to discover my own inferiority to the average of men, just in what I hope to exceed them—in force, and talent, and energy. I find myself grovelling in the most miserable obscurity at an age when mediocrity of the humblest sort is pocketing a good income, and getting puffed as something distinguished. I must have been mad to fancy I had any gift beyond the crowd. I must cure myself of that frenzy, and put on the hair shirt of humility, and clap my vanity into mourning. And, in the name of goodness, why should I plague *you* with my self-persecutions! and expect you to interest yourself in the uneasy sprawls of my egotism? I’m ashamed—I—Good bye!”

He seizes his hat, and vanishes.

Then Helen darts into Edward’s arms, like a bird to its nest.

“Oh, Edward! Edward! what is it?”

She has had the question knocking at the coral gate of her lips for the last hour. If poor John Drewe could have guessed how she was wishing him gone! She has hardly taken in a word he has said: even while she seemed looking at him, she saw nothing but the frowning face of her god.

Poor child! he rejects her caress, and, starting up, stamps with rage.

“D—— him!” he says; and begins to stride about the room. All of a sudden he comes up to Helen as she sits sobbing, very frightened, very unhappy—a very, very little resentful—and falls on his knees, and clasps her in his arms.

“Helen, Helen, my soul, it’s all over! forgive and forget it, my sweet; I couldn’t help it. I adore you so

much, I can't endure to see you give even a look to any other man. I swear I could have thrown this teapot at Jack, when I saw that you admired him! To see you engrossed by him, hanging on his rough eloquence, doubtless comparing *me*, shallow, and feeble, and idle, to that fine intellectual bull of a fellow—it was hell!”

His wife is in heaven! All her terror and anguish have vanished like vapours pierced by sunshine. Why, it was jealousy, after all! It is a long while before jealousy ceases to be (to a woman) the most delicious flattery.

“My darling Edward, my foolish Edward!” (between kisses and tears of joy) “to be jealous of anybody! If he could see himself as I see him——” and so on, and so on.

The poor girl! as if she really saw him! as if she had ever yet seen the real Edward Hartley!

CHAPTER XV.

LETTERS FROM LONDON.

“MY DEAREST MAMMA,

“I must tell you of a surprising thing that happened to me this morning, though I believe it won't surprise you at all. I was by myself—Edward gone somewhere with Mr. Drewe—and writing to uncle Montague, when I heard a sharp sort of rattatat at the street-door. Some friend of Edward, I took for granted, who would be told he was out, and go away. No such thing, for there came such a rush of footsteps upstairs, as if somebody was racing with the servant; open flew the door, and in darted—Oh, *you* know, Mrs. Mamma! a short, brisk, bolt-upright, white-haired old gentleman—who told the servant ‘that would do,’ and didn't wait to be announced, and seemed in a great hurry, at first. ‘Mrs. Edward

Hartley, I presume ?' (on which I made him one of *your* beautiful grand curtseys). 'Howdydo ? How's mamma ? I'm grandpapa. Heard all about me ; horrid old fellow, wicked granpa Dammy—eh ? Never mind. Kiss and friends—that's right.' So I had kissed the old gentleman, and he had kissed me, and he was sitting by me on the sofa, before I had quite recovered my wits. He kept on talking as fast as he could pelt, and staring at me with his handsome old hazel eyes, which have a faded sort of mischievous twinkle in them—but yours are somehow very like them, for all that. He said he only received your letter this morning, for he has been on the Continent, and returned sooner than he was expected ; and so several letters followed him there and back.

" 'So mamma never told you she had written to me ? Like Mrs. Louy's pride ! Waited to see if the old fellow would hold out. He isn't so black as he's painted, is he, little girl ?—not so bad as you expected—eh ?' "

" 'No sir,' said I, which made him laugh heartily. I am sorry to say he does not think me a bit like you—nobody will allow it. However, he considers me good-looking too, I can tell you—at least, he said he did, and in fact, *swore* it, and then began to cough. Oh, mamma, I'm afraid your papa is rather a naughty old gentleman, but, just as he said, not so bad as I expected ; and very good-natured, and certainly very fond of *you*, in spite of what is past and gone. But, do you know, I found he had not the least idea of—that I—that my marriage"—(here Helen's MS. becomes blurred with pen-marks through these last few words, then emerges clear and brave)—"that we were married against Mr. Hartley's will, and that I was so cruel as to deceive you, my darling mamma, who have forgiven me. He said he hoped I was a good, obedient little girl to you (as for *little*, I'm as tall as he is), and that you had not spoiled me, as he spoiled you. So I thought I would be honest and straightforward now, at any rate, and said, 'Grandpapa, Edward and I ran away. His father had ordered him not to marry me ; and I did not even tell dear

mamma, and was very deceitful and ungrateful to her. She has forgiven me, because she is so good, and loves me more than I deserve; but Mr. Hartley is very angry, and perhaps will never pardon us.' Grandpapa made such an extraordinary face I could hardly help laughing, though I felt so serious, and then he burst out—

"'Louy over again! Good Lord! It must be in the blood! My mother ran away with my father, seventy years ago!'

"Then another profane ejaculation, and then—

"'Papa-in-law's estate entailed, I hope?'

"'What's that, grandpapa?'

"'What's that? Good Lord! There she goes. Louy over again! *Sor-did dross!*'

"He sang that in such a funny falsetto squeak, as if he were mimicking some one. But he looked quite serious and uneasy; and I really could not tell him anything about Mr. Hartley's property—how should I, when I neither know nor care?—and I'm sure Edward does not, either. However, just then, he came in—I was so glad—he looked so astonished when I announced who my white-haired old gentleman was. They shook hands; Edward was a little stiff, but I could see that grandpapa admired him very much; of course he could not help it. He did not stay long after that, but asked us to dinner to-morrow. He is only in town for a few days, then is off to Scotland: we promised we would go. I shall wear uncle Montague's embroidered muslin gown, trimmed with that beautiful lace you have sent me, and which I know you have stripped off your own gown, you dear Eider-duck of a mamma.

"Edward says he kisses your feet; and I am, my darling mamma, your loving

"II. II."

In the same mail-bag travelled Colonel Danhaye's reply to his daughter. She had not seen her father's hand for sixteen years, and then it was on the blank cover of her last rejected appeal to him. Opening his

letter before Helen's, she half expected to see her own inside, now !

"MY DEAR LOUY,

"I should have acknowledged your very dutiful and proper letter sooner, but did not get it. By all means let bygones be bygones. I have just been to call on your girl. She is the handsomest young woman I ever saw, and appears amiable and accomplished, &c. Her husband is to her taste, I suppose—anything the matter with his ears, that he wears his hair so long? They dine with me to-morrow, and they will meet the Nettlefolds, who I find are in town also. God bless you! Your affectionate father,

"PHILIP DANHAYE.

"P.S.—Is the Hartley property entailed?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NETTLEFOLDS.

"MRS. NETTLEFOLD, my love," says Mr. Nettlefold, "where is our sweet Georgina?"

He mouths his words a good deal, and speaks with infinite pompous politeness, for the benefit of the servants; for it is dinner-time.

But he and Mrs. Nettlefold, his love, had a skirmish of tongues, almost amounting to a pitched battle, in the quarter of an hour that they were awaiting the announcement of their repast, just now. They had got on the old grievance about "money," which you may remember that little Mrs. Louisa disrespectfully implied was the well-picked bone of contention between this pair. Mrs. Louisa must have found it out by some

miracle, I think, for nothing can be more decorously and punctiliously affectionate than the demeanour of this wealthy and well-bred couple, as far as eye can reach.

"Georgina is gone to Northumberland Chapel, my dear Mr. Nettlefold," says his wife, with her suave smile.

"Bless me! To chapel! On a week-day! But our sweet enthusiast will get wet, my love. It rains, I perceive."

"It is but a street or two off, and there are conveyances easily to be had, my dear Mr. Nettlefold."

"Our rash darling will, I know, prefer to walk, even in the rain; and, as the poet observes—'to bide the pelt-ing of the pitiless storm—'" (mouthing excessively).

An astounding knock at the hall-door interrupts the dignified speaker.

"Miss Nettlefold, sir," says the butler, who has put his head out at the door, and has seen that lady and her companion entering the hall with two dripping umbrellas.

Before Miss Nettlefold went to the neighbouring fashionable chapel this evening, she was in that highly irritable condition which might be called her usual state of spirits. She has attended this chapel very assiduously—even coming up from the country on purpose to do so—ever since the fluent, interesting, and unmarried Mr. Piperson performed there. Nothing can be more common than Miss Nettlefold's voracious appetite for church-going, unaccompanied by the least thirst for religion.

All this day, until two hours ago, she was exercising her lungs in a perpetual scold, at the top of a voice never soft and low. The chief victim of this voice is a very pretty meek-looking little poor relation, who has been hired to receive and absorb the inconvenient amount of Miss Nettlefold's nervous irritability. All the way downstairs, as they were going out, the gentle daughter of the house might have been heard to bestow a species

of moral thumping on the patient and inaudible Miss Pidgely.

"No, I won't! Get out! I hate goloshes. *Will* you hold your tongue, Susan Pidgely? You *know* I never get cold from wet feet. You pester me to death; you do it on purpose. If I were not a Christian I should *hate* you, Susan Pidgely."

And hereabouts the street-door closed upon them.

Now she is come back, and Miss Nettlefold's mood is changed, by some inexplicable process, into one altogether different. That sour hard green plum seems to have become soft, as if overboiled. Having put off her bonnet and shawl, "our sweet enthusiast," accompanied by Miss Pidgely, descends straightway into the dining-room, where her parents sit at dessert in a majestic *tête-à-tête*. And down she sinks with a rap-turous sigh into an arm-chair, and—

"Oh, that dear Mr. Piperson!" she cries, "what a dear, dear person! Ho, you can't think, papa, how sweet he was to-night! I could sit at his feet for ever, and worship him!"

"My darling love, Georgina," says Mr. Nettlefold, a little scandalized, "you would say, listen to him."

"Now, papa," rejoins his Georgina, in a great shriek of expostulation, "can't you let me alone? Now, I do declare it is too bad! Every word I say looked at and picked to pieces—you make my life a burden to me, you and Susan Pidgely. If I were not a Christian, papa, I should kill myself—and you two might dance on my grave!"

I suppose that the bare thought of this funereal fandango, executed by herself and her stately kinsman, affects little Susan Pidgely to tears; for she covers her face with her handkerchief, and presently slips out of the room.

Mr. Nettlefold having, with much tenderness, soothed his too susceptible child, peace is restored, and Georgina continues her ecstasitic summary of that evening's amusement. She has picked up all the slang of the "serious,"

among whom she has enrolled herself; and the parrot-like way in which she imitates them would cause you to laugh, if it did not, which is much more likely, make you feel very unwell. But there is nothing strange or rare in the present mood of poor Miss Nettlefold, any more than in the splenetic impatience which devours her, and so many other young women of England who have passed the age of thirty unmarried. To which peevish dissatisfaction she, however, adds the dead weight of her unusual want of intellectual life, and of all feminine grace. By her "conversion," she has lost the only intellectual occupation she ever had. She has been taught to consider story-books and magazines, and such literature as indeed constitutes the only palatable sort of reading to the majority of women, as dangerous, immoral, ruinous to the soul; has been taught that it is a crime to read them. And when these were withdrawn their place was supplied by the totally unmeaning and unintelligible trash of pseudo-religious publications, which fell out of her sleepy hands, and were succeeded by *nothing*. The natural consequence was a speedy deterioration of her already mean intelligence; and there ensued a frequent delivery up of her limited mind to lazy vacant stupors, which she dignifies by the name of religious meditations. Mrs. Nettlefold takes no part in her daughter's spiritual diversions. She herself is, as you must have perceived, a lady of distinguished but dignified piety; quiet unlikely to fall into the wild and ludicrous excesses of vulgar fanaticism. *She* plays no fantastic tricks in the name of religion—for her no pitying angels weep.

At this moment she is thinking solely, and with something like despair, of a cruel blow which has shattered her dearest hopes, and the pain of which she has had to bear this day without wincing, with even a suave congratulatory smile, at the hand of her brother. That exasperating old gentleman just darted into her drawing-room for a withering moment, to tumble out on her, in his helter-skelter way, his news of "Louy," her "very proper" letter, her handsome daughter, the runaway

marriage, and the invitation to the family dinner-party in Park Lane next day.

"A sort of peace-congress, Latitia, eh? You'll be sure to come. I thought you'd be glad to hear that Louy and I have made it up at last. Going to live in future like good Christians, and all that. You'll be sure to come, all of you."

After he had got to the door, and she thought she could relieve her feelings and invoke a blessing on the niece that had circumvented her at last, back he came—

"Louy's girl is the handsomest young woman I ever saw in my life! You'll be sure to come."

She feels it too late to struggle any more; or she might endeavour to open the eyes of her infatuated brother, even now. She might point out the significant moment at which his daughter finds it convenient to humble herself, and cajole him into a pardon that may be worth seeking, with a penniless son-in-law on her hands. No, it is too late; any such attempt would look insidious now—would only be out of character with that sweetness and pious charity which she may still trade on in a smaller way.

Mrs. Nettlefold has kept her own counsel all her life; her fault is candour; while she scarcely takes her tea without a stratagem! And she sits now with her elderly-lady-like hands dallying with a bunch of grapes, and a guileless, cheerful, handsome, elderly face—quite pleasant to behold!

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. JOHN DREWE REDUCES HIS THEORY TO PRACTICE.

THE family dinner-party in Park Lane went off without incident. But Helen wrote an account of it to her mother, and appeared delighted with her great-aunt Nettlefold.

"Such a fine dignified figure, and then the soft short curls of her own grey hair give quite a guileless look to her handsome old face. She came up and embraced me most affectionately, and asked after my 'dearest mother,' with a gentle sigh, and looked at me so benignly, and said how like you I was—(the first person that has had the sense to find it out). So that altogether great-auntie quite won my heart. Mr. Nettlefold seems a very stupid old man. He got me into a corner after dinner, with his chair in front of mine, and began telling me a story, just as the clock on the chimney-piece was striking ten; and when we went away, at a quarter-past eleven, it did not seem finished. Not that I have the least idea what it was about, except that the Duke of Wellington was somehow in it: I think I must have been asleep part of the time. Miss Nettlefold is not at all nice. She came and sat down by me before dinner, and asked me, in a gruff sort of way, if I had been to hear Piperson yet? And when I said 'No; was he a singer?' she gave me a look of indignation and horror, and got up and walked off, and never spoke to me more! She looks rather old—at least thirty-five, I should think—and really horribly cross, and bony, and plain. I don't like her a bit. There was one other guest there, Mr. William Drewe. I suppose he is staying with the Nettlefolds; he came to grandpapa's with them. He was not very gracious to me, is very big and lumpish, and I think he must be the stupidest young man in the world. I like his brother so much better. We see him nearly every day. He has never mentioned the Nettlefolds, so I suppose that he is not so intimate with his relations as his brother William seems. Grandpapa has just given me a pearl bracelet, and twenty pounds. He is gone to Scotland, and desires his love to you."

A day or two after, John Drewe coming to see the young couple, Helen spoke of the family dinner-party at grandpapa's, and asked him if he saw much of the Nettlefolds.

John turned unaccountably red, and answered confusedly,—

"No—yes; he had been frequently at their house,"—and took up a book, and began to talk about that. By-and-by, Edward spoke of a friend of his who had just married a little tradesman's daughter, and Helen (as ladies almost always do in such cases) proceeded to pity the deluded bridegroom.

"What sort of a companion can a gentleman ever make of an uneducated or under-educated girl?" cried she.

John Drewe cut her short with his usual freedom, and without his usual kindness:

"That's all stuff, begging your pardon! I don't believe that men find more sympathy in lady-wives than in women of what you call the lower class."

"But," said Helen, rather startled at his vehement antagonism, "what conversation could you, for instance, carry on with an uneducated woman?"

"As far as my experience goes," quoth John, "intellect is very rare among women of any degree; and I, for my part, desire nothing beyond natural intelligence—don't want to be charmed by my wife's talented conversation. I shouldn't marry a woman to hear her talk essays that I could read—or rather *couldn't*—in some cut-and-dry review. The only thing education teaches women is criticism; and women must be bad critics at the best, feeble reflections of what they read, or of the men they live with, or are fond of."

"That affectation of contempt for women is stale," said Edward, "and bearish too, before one of them, Master Jack. I suppose you have been snubbed by some clever young lady."

"Contempt for women!" cried John, "because I say that they should be 'pure and womanly'? And as for bearish, I don't consider your wife a highly educated woman."

Helen laughed till the tears ran from her beautiful eyes. But presently John proceeded with grim earnestness:

"No; I don't believe in your highly educated women.

When I see the enormous importance society attaches to absurd restraints of manner, ways of holding spoons and forks, and such miseries, I say, 'What kind of education can it be in which such petty things are exalted into significance?' After all, does the young lady know real right from real wrong one bit better than—or perhaps as well as—some of the poor little sempstresses in garrets, who are quite as pretty, and quite as intelligent, though they can't criticise the new poem-book, or talk bad French, or play the piano tolerably after banging it four hours a day for fourteen years of their useful lives! I tell you, I should prefer marriage with some of the lowest-born and most uneducated girls of sixteen I have met with, both abroad and at home, from the excellence of their natural endowments, both in mind and body, to an alliance with most ladies, educated as most ladies are."

"So, after all, you're only quarrelling with bad education, or what you consider such," said Edward. "And who will take the trouble to contradict you? But do you mean to deny the power of *good* education? I tell you, it can do all but change the race, and blow the breath of life into the nostrils. If the natural inbred organization of a man or woman does not possess intelligence or sensibility, of course education can't give *them*, any more than it can give imagination or beauty."

"I believe," said John, more temperately, "we only differ so far as this. You lay greater stress on education, and less on natural gifts than I do. The other day, in a suburban lane, I met a school of fifty charity girls. I looked at the faces of all of them: there were only two that had any trace of souls. All the rest looked as if their heads were lumps of putty, just thrown out of the workshop of nature, with a couple of digs for eyes, and another for a mouth. But the other two were angels, in motion, gesture, and shape; they went along laughing and picking the hedge-flowers, while their dead fellows, but half awake, were footing the road hand in hand, dull as sheep. Now, what could even your 'good' education do with one of those lumps? Could it ever make of her one

of those angels, such as they are now without it? And those it might spoil. I believe it would."

When John was gone, Edward said, "He is contemplating marriage with some little 'prentice girl, who writes him love-letters full of bad spelling."

Not exactly, but just a week after, and a week before they themselves left England, came this note from Mr. John Drewe:—

"Dover, Sept.

"MY DEAR NED AND WIFE,

"I was married this morning to Susan Pidgely, a poor relation of my uncle Nettlefold's, and consequently of my own. She has been his daughter's companion, and I hope will find it happier to be mine. She is the orphan daughter of a disreputable vagabond, who was first (I believe) a tailor, then an itinerant preacher, and died in a debtors' prison. She is nineteen years old, good, and beautiful. We are off to Blancheville in half an hour, for I have obtained literary work there, on condition I fill a vacancy in forty-eight hours. God bless you both! Take care of your wife, Ned: you have in her a specimen of young-ladyhood more than rare.

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN DREWE."

END OF PART II.

PART III.



CHAPTER I.

MAISON DULAC.

IT is the small garden of Maison Dulac, in the little village of Les Étangs, ten minutes by rail from Blanchecville.

You may have perceived, if you looked up at the street-front of the house, before you came through it into the court and garden, that Maison Dulac (*ancienne* Maison Dubois) is an "Hôtel et Restaurant, tenu par Adolphe Dulac."

Few people come here to sleep, but a great many to eat, mostly out of doors, in summer time, flocking from their beloved little Brummagem Paris on Sundays and all other fête days. Two or three more Hôtels and Restaurants rear themselves in these damp retreats, but there are Brummagem Parisians to fill them all, and run over into the green lanes, and along the banks of the froggy little lakes.

There is Monsieur Adolphe himself. That small swarthy young man in a linen jacket, with rather a down look in his muddy black eyes and his blue shaven face. He positively looks like a little villain, altogether in consequence of that bushy black moustache which projects under his nose. In reality, he is a good-natured little fellow--civil and obliging in his public capacity,

and a lamb at home. Tenderly attached to Madame Adolphe (that stately young woman half a head taller than himself, now crossing the courtyard), and adoring their little daughter, that demure four-year-old damsel in a pink frock and black silk apron, peeping about at the company. Observe how he catches her up and kisses her in a hurry, whenever he can rid his hands of the dishes and bottles with which he is continually racing backwards and forwards; and pokes into her round mouth odds and ends of sweet *boudin*, or *omelette à la confiture*, or even a remaining sip of cherry brandy.

It is a sweet evening, in the beginning of May. The setting sun stripes the garden with long shadows and warm radiance. The garden swarms with the Blancheville bourgeoisie, and twinkles and flutters with ribbons, feathers, and flowers. Old, young and middle-aged make holiday here, and the noise is bewildering. Little tables are planted everywhere, at which gay groups dine, with much chatter, clatter, and popping of corks; or sip coffee and cognac; or perhaps a *bon bourgeois*, who has relations with England, drinks *thé à l'Anglaise* with his wife and family, cutting monstrous and incessant *tartines* for hot and clamorous children.

There is a pavilion, *donnant sur l'étang*, at the end of the garden, in the large room of which a wedding party have dined, and are now preparing to dance to the inspiring strains of a fiddle, bassoon, and cornet-à-piston imported express from Blancheville. *La jeunesse* outside here, clapping their hands at the first bars of the polka, rush to arms. Les braves Blanchevillais, sleek little young men, their pale and noble countenances adorned with jetty moustaches, the tightness of their boots imparting a momentary sadness to their features, bow before much furbelowed Brummagem Parisiennes, mostly with flattish noses and fattish ancles. These, taking off Brummagem Parisian bonnets, hang them carefully on trees, and yielding their plump waists to the sleek young men, whirl, twirl, and prattle their Brummagem French, as joyous, if not as light, as real Frenchwomen.

There are three or four close-leaved arbours in the garden, formed of clipped evergreens, or of hop-plants trained over trellises. They are furnished with little tables and seats, and are named, like ships, l'Etoile, la Glorieuse, les Délices. In l'Etoile, a hop-arbour, are seated two Englishmen, drinking a bottle of Chablis. One is a young gentleman of twenty-six or seven, who has come from Italy last, and who has been absent from England for five years and a half. His name is Edward Hartley. Passing through Blancheville, *en route* to England, he came here to see an old schoolfellow, who made a rash marriage some years ago; and, having been quite discarded on that, among other convenient pretexts, by his family, is living cheaply, and not nicely, in Blancheville — comfortably out of the way of his relations, and in the best way he can contrive for himself, wife, and child. He resides most of the year in Blancheville, *au premier*, in a musty old Place, in a few dismal, little rooms with shiny painted yellow floors, and great solemn stoves that look like black marble tombs, and warm and cheer you about as much. There he sits and writes for all the publishers and editors, and in all the journals and magazines, that will pay him ever so little. He comes here for the summer months, just to save himself from being blinded by the glare of omnipresent *ceruse* and pavement. He is John Drewe, whom you know already, whose father is own clergyman to Hartley, of Hartley Hall. His thirty-two years do not sit lightly on his broad bowed shoulders; his blond Saxon face is exceedingly rugged, stern, and careful; it has the dreary, fixed dejection of the man who struggles without hope or cheer. He wears an old blouse, and a tanned straw hat; and his little son, also in a blouse and straw hat, stands against his knee, watching, with rather wistful eyes, the other children who play in the garden, and sometimes timidly glancing up at his father's face severely grave.

"But I say, John," cries Edward Hartley, "isn't it almost time for me to be off?"

He has started up, interrupting Drewe's dismal recital of his own dismal prospects, into which he has been led by the apparent *bon accueil* and sympathy of his old schoolfellow. That young gentleman's manners are still charmingly genial, until you bore him—and how selfish you *must* be to wish to trouble him with your troubles!

John stops short at the impatient remark, bites his light moustache, and remains silent, an angry red coming into his face.

Edward does not ask him to go on, and there is a pause. The younger man stands at the entrance of l'Etoile, and stares rather wearily at the gay company. Then he glances down at little Johnny Drewe, patiently standing by his father, and says in a kind voice—for he likes children that are pretty, and not in the way:

"Hallo, little bird! ain't you tired of standing there so quiet?"

Johnny turns up his wee face, and replies demurely:

"If you please, my leds are vezzy untumfble."

"But how is it you can't speak plain? How old are you, young man?"

"I am four last Sattleday," answers Johnny.

"I've no time to attend to him," says John Drewe, shortly, hoisting his son on a seat.

"So much the better," rejoins Edward; "children lose half their fun and fascination as soon as they can speak plain. Parle-tu Français, mon cher?"

"Oui, monsieur," rejoins Johnny, promptly. "Je parle Français, tlez bien."

"Ah, bravo! Dis donc, qu'est-ce que tu pense de toi-même. Allons."

"S'il vous plait, monsieur," says Johnny, demurely, folding his puds and casting down his eyes, "je suis un petit pécheur."

At this announcement, Edward Hartley bursts into such a peal of laughter, shout at shout, that everybody in the garden, now trooping out in the gathering twilight, turns back to stare at him. And when he can stop, he casts a glance of insulted majesty at the cat

of a canaille that presumes to look at him, and walks off.

"What do you mean by that nonsense?" says Drewe, sharply, as soon as the child can hear him; "who taught you to say that?"

"Cousin Guillaume," falters Johnny, frightened.

John the elder makes a face under the shadow of his old straw hat, and locks his lips, staring after Edward, who is dimly visible striding about the courtyard, petting his wounded dignity. By dint of staring at him, John Drewe sees him at last, and can distract some painful personal reflections by thinking about him.

"Not improved," he says to himself. "Selfish lad, heartless man, or I'm much mistaken."

Presently the young gentleman (he has a very young look still) comes back in excellent spirits, raised by a capital cigar, presented and illuminated by the handsome Madame Adolphe.

"Not at all a bad idea of yours, Jack, coming to rusticate here. Pretty little merry green place. I've a great mind to come and stay a month with you."

"You would find it slow," returns Drewe, with discouraging grimness; "all work and no play have made Jack a dull boy."

"But why no play? Why don't you play with your little boy here? Now, I should delight in having such a little chap about me."

Drewe is silent for a minute, and when he speaks it is as if he had a pain in his throat, as people who speak with tears in their eyes.

"Well, I must take him into bed now; so I'll leave you here till I come back; or shall I say good-bye?"

"Oh, I'm off. I'm just gone. We shall take the night train to O——"

They walk into Maison Dulac together, through the twilight garden and court, now nearly emptied of guests.

Following John, who leads Johnny, and talking all

the way, Edward finds himself going up the carpetless stairs with those two.

At the top he says he must wish Drewe good-bye; that he should have liked to be introduced to Mrs. Drewe, but as she chooses to be invisible——

They are standing at one end of a long dimly illumined passage; at the other is a half-opened door, through which at this moment a light streams out. Demure little Johnny suddenly draws back behind his father, looking archly at this shining cleft, then bursts into that gleeful laugh of children, and bounds forward. For there stands in the doorway, holding a lamp in her hand, a woman, with the most beautiful face in the world! Girlish, fair, graced with long, loose, lovely burnished locks, and now all clothed with angelical smiles.

The boy has rushed from his father's hand and now wraps himself in his mother's skirts.

Edward Hartley is quite transfixed by this vision. It is a saint, a Madonna! But the saint, the Madonna, speaks—says ruthlessly, in the sweetest of voices, “Good night,”—draws with her the little boy, who is burying his head in her lap. The door closes—the vision is snatched away!

CHAPTER II.

PRESENT AND PAST.

EDWARD HARTLEY expected to find his wife and her maid at their Blancheville Hotel, packed up and only waiting for him to start on their night journey to O——. As he entered, a waiter gave him a letter, which he carelessly took, and carried upstairs without opening.

He was astonished to find, when he did examine it, a

note from Helen, accompanied by another addressed to *her* in a strange scrawl.

His wife's letter contained these words :

“DEAR EDWARD,—

“I have had the enclosed letter from Tatt. You will see by it the cause of my sudden departure. I have waited two hours, thinking you might come in, but I cannot delay setting off any longer. They tell me I should miss a boat. Sophie says she has money enough to take us. I should think you had better, if you have no objection, wait at Blancheville till you hear from me. Tatt's dreadful fear may not be realized. I will write as soon after I arrive as possible.

“Yours,

“H. H.”

But honest Tatt's manuscript proved an inscrutable mystery to Helen's husband. In nurse's tender youth popular education had not been protested and preached against, in and out of the pulpit, simply because that dangerous symptom had, as yet, hardly declared itself in our social system. Edward Hartley frowned over her mystic characters for half a minute, and flung the note on the table in angry disgust.

He felt highly indignant at the unexpected turn of events, and at the manner in which his wife had coolly left him *planté là*, and mystified, recommending him to addle his brains over those ridiculous crooked marks. Yet he knew very well that the poor girl might, in that haste, excitement, and alarm, signified rather than expressed, easily have forgotten that he had not the key of experience, as she had, to her nurse's cipher.

And certainly it was not her fault that she had waited for him in vain, and knew not where to find him. He had settled at breakfast time that they should start by a night train to O——, *en route* to England. He had then marched out to pick up what amusement he could among picture-galleries and shops. Chancing

to go into a bookseller's shop in the Galerie Vitrée, he saw upon the counter a packet addressed to Monsieur Jean Drewe, Maison Dulac, Les Étangs. And for the first time for five years he recollected his old schoolfellow, and that he had gone to Blancheville on his marriage, a few days before he himself had quitted England. The whim seized him to run down to Les Étangs to surprise Jack, and away he went. Any thought of going back to request the pleasure of Helen's company, or even to inform her of his own intentions, or indeed any thought whatever of the solitary wife in the hotel, never entered his head. It seldom did now.

He savagely rang the bell, and ferociously ordered something to eat and drink, feeling the most aggrieved of husbands. But a delicate little repast resulted in milder meditations. He presently came to the conclusion that he might as well wait at Blancheville, as his wife had suggested. She had promised to write on her arrival; but arrival *where*? He had naturally taken for granted that she was gone to Hartley Hall; that Mrs. Hartley was ill, and that Tatt had written to summon her daughter; but, after all, this was mere supposition. For the real facts he was referred to Tatt's letter, which he could no more read than the stars. Stop! He had an idea! Jack Drewe could read Coptic, he knew; he might be able to translate old Tatt into English. He would go to-morrow, the first thing, and ask him. It was clearly his duty to find out where his wife was. Whereupon Mr. Edward Hartley, determined to do his duty, went to bed—and dreamed of his neighbour's wife.

All these five years, the only son of Hartley, of Hartley Hall, has been, with his wife, subsisting entirely on the bounty of her Indian uncle. We know how Montague Ashton behaved on the announcement, eighteen years before, of his only brother's rash flight across the border with a penniless heiress. Really this Bengal civilian seemed the protecting providence of runaway lovers!

He had as kindly, and with as few phrases, signified to his adopted daughter and her husband that they could draw on his London agents for £100 every quarter, and added his affectionate God bless them to this announcement.

Mr. Ashton had now ample means, and, bachelor as he remained, might have made his adopted child a larger allowance; for he only doubled what he had hitherto transmitted for her. But he did not wish to tempt her husband into contented slothfulness. He hoped Edward Hartley would work for more. He was far from the injustice of condemning or distrusting a man whom he did not know at all, only because he had disliked the shape of his head as a child. But Mrs. Hartley had written to her brother-in-law freely and frankly—had told him all her anguish and fears for her girl—the cruel and groundless enmity to which her stepfather sacrificed even his own son, and implored Montague's fatherly care and counsel in her child's behalf. She took so much blame to herself in all that had happened, that she left comparatively little to be bestowed on anybody else. Still she had, without the least exaggeration or violence, warned her brother of those fatal flaws in Edward's showy porcelain, which she had neither discovered nor suspected till too late.

Helen, in writing as at first she frequently did, to her uncle, only betrayed the childish thoughtlessness with which she had yielded to the first sweet whispers of womanly passion, the tenderness and pride of her strong, unformed character, and, at the same time, her utter ignorance of any life but that of ease, love, and romance. But her letters became few and far between to her uncle; and, even to her mother, gradually but totally changed in tone. She never said she was not perfectly happy, and always wrote as if in cheerful spirits. But her husband ceased to appear in her letters, except in the meagre formalities of a concluding message, or incidentally, when his name could not be omitted without singularity.

Judge if the affectionate acute uncle, and the poor

adoring mother, did not draw their own painful conclusions!

So, all those five years of their marriage Mr. Edward Hartley and his wife had lived in Italy on uncle Montague's money; the young gentleman complaining a good deal now and then of the narrowness of his circumstances, and wondering impatiently how much longer old Hartley Hall would hold out; and not once taking into his consideration the possibility of earning money for himself. But £400 per annum will go farther in Italy than in England—if you know how to manage, and don't travel about too much.

And Edward Hartley was by no means so utterly unlike the paternal screw, in every respect, as he fancied himself. He knew very well, for instance, how to manage his money so as to make the most enjoyable use of it. Of course, his wife had none of her own, but what he could spare her. But as, luckily for her, he had as great a horror of the ugly features of poverty as of any other ill-looking sour face about him, his wife had always a pretty apartment, pretty dresses, and a pretty maid, and they had really lived with considerable ease and comfort. Especially as they had had no children—save a two-hours' babe, over whose little dead face Helen, in the first year of her love-marriage, had sobbed *alone*.

CHAPTER III.

TATT'S MANUSCRIPT.

WHEN Edward Hartley arrived at Les Étangs next day, which he did at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, he walked through the carriage entrance into the courtyard of Maison Dulac, and, hearing voices, into the little garden beyond. In l'Étoile there sat two persons, one of whom was reading, or preaching, in that particular

English accent which seems to imply that the message of grace must needs be delivered through the nose. In the beautiful woman who sat in the arbour, and sewed while she listened, Edward immediately recognised the wife of his old schoolfellow. She wore a kind of half-mourning grey gown, simple, but perfectly becoming, with snowy muslin sleeves, and a little pleated frill at her throat. Her hat was of grey straw, with a black and grey ribbon knotted round it. In this cold stony setting, her serene face bloomed like a flower on a granite rock. The sun-rays crept between the hop-leaves, and illumined her lovely fairness, and gilded the blonde of her rippled braids, which the leaf-shadows deepened, deepening also the pure blue of her large serious eyes; and sun and shadow lay light on her whole slender girlish figure, like a web of dusky gauze shot with gold. Edward introduced himself reverentially; she received him with a manner as coldly saccharine as a raspberry ice; while the man who was holding forth held his tongue, and shut his eyes, with a sweet smile on his fat hot face. He was a short plump young man, not bad-looking in a pink and white way, but with something swinish in his aspect, especially in his little mean eye, when you could catch it open.

Edward hastened to apologise for his intrusion, and to explain to the beautiful personage in grey that he had come to ask a favour of his old friend John. He was listened to with demure politeness, and an appearance of cutting indifference, and was informed in a soft voice that Mr. Drewe was not at home, he was walking somewhere. No, she did not know in what direction. No, she did not know when he would come back. There was a passive antagonism and resistance in her manner, that quite stimulated Edward's admiration. That sort of manner in a pretty woman is always *agaçante* (now and then unintentionally). Her repulse is so attractive, that, like Balaam, she blesses men the more she would ban them. Edward almost forgot his errand there, and Tatt's mystic oracle in his pocket, and was throwing himself, with his

usual lazy ardour, into the delightful campaign before him, when John Drewe, with Johnny trotting after, appeared at his shoulder. On which, with a very unkind glance towards the pig-faced young man, sweetly simpering, with his eyes shut, in the arbour, Edward carried off Drewe into la Glorieuse, and, briefly explaining the position of affairs, laid Helen's note and enclosure before him.

Drewe's face betrayed no more emotion than a physician's, as his eye travelled down poor Tatt's curious crooked lines, which he justified Edward's expectations by deciphering without much difficulty. When he had finished, he paused half a minute, and then asked, with portentous gravity :

"Shall I read it you, or tell you the contents?"

Edward said, a little nervously :

"Tell me the upshot."

"The upshot is, that your mother-in-law is dangerously ill. She was not in her senses, and incessantly crying out for her daughter. Tatt must have been out of her wits, too, to send for your wife into an atmosphere reeking with typhus; for I gather that was what she feared Mrs. Hartley had. The letter is dated ten days ago, sent to wait your arrival at Blancheville: Tatt must have known beforehand letters were to be addressed there, to wait for you. When you get back to town presently, you will most likely find another letter to announce that it is all over."

John Drewe said all this without the least management. He believed he had gauged the depth of Edward's sensibility, and was not afraid of overwhelming him with terror and anguish by suggestions of evil impending over other people. He was therefore astonished at the dismay which changed that handsome mobile face, and the half-stifled cry of consternation at this interpretation of the oracle.

"What horrors! what horrors! And who knows—"

Then starting up, "Good-bye, John; make my adieux and excuses to Mrs. Drewe. Thanks, and good-bye."

"Are you off to Blancheville?"

"And to England in half an hour."

John was still more surprised, and even said, with ill-disguised irony:

"What good will that do? You see your wife does not expect you. Why run your head into this bother, not to say peril? Besides, Mrs. Hartley is not even your own mother."

Edward stopped short as he was going, turned round, and looked John in the face with a curious expression in his own; and then he said:

"Perhaps I'm not so bad as you think, Jack; or perhaps I am worse. 'Besides,' as you say, my father may get the fever, and I ought to be at hand to have a chance of his blessing, and to look after the property, you know. *Lebe wohl.*"

He found no letter at Blancheville, and was off to England in half an hour.

CHAPTER IV

HELEN'S RETURN.

HELEN, till she reached Toxeter, had travelled on the wings of steam all the way; but that was the nearest station to Hartley Hall. By that time the poor child was so exhausted by fatigue, and breathless with nervous excitement, that she could only gasp a broken sentence or two, by way of directions to her maid. Fortunately, that young woman was a good-natured, clever French girl, speaking her little English with great audacity, and understanding nearly every word of it that was said to her.

So she soon had her young mistress seated in a carriage behind two good horses, and was wrapping her up even tenderly, as she sat white and passive in the corner beside

her. For all this journey Helen had been as one benumbed, crushed under a great dread, beset by sharp anguish, and a remorse so inexpressible, that for hours and hours nothing had occurred to her to say, or even to think, but two words! One piteous cry seemed continually to well up to her lips, and be uttered almost unconsciously—"My mother! my mother!" and again, and again, "My mother! my mother!"

She now sat straining her locked hands together on her lap, staring out at the darkening hilly road, and vaguely recognising the familiar hedgerows, gates, and glimpses of woody slopes and hollows over them, that composed the rural landscape which seemed to sweep past her. Just when she saw the light from the ivied casements of the lodge glow out through the dusk across the white highway, a carriage came rapidly out of the park gates, Toxeter-wards. Somebody in this carriage, as the vehicles passed each other, put his head out as if struck by the life and death speed to which Helen's horses were urged, and probably guessing the destination of the travellers behind them.

Helen recognised the face of a Toxeter physician, and knew she might hear in a moment all she hoped or dreaded; but she shrank back trembling from an irrevocable worst, clinging to that agony of suspense, as a man would clutch, with bleeding fingers, the thornbush which suspends him over a precipice.

So, right through the gateway, plunging into the black tunnel of beechen avenue, and up the open park, the galloping horses carried Helen towards the great dim pile, looming against the sky, upon a woody hill. But as the old familiar house rose out of the dusk, nearer and nearer, frowning and ominously dark, without a smile of welcoming light in all its windows, a sudden wild new terror seized her heart. For the first time since she commenced her journey, she remembered that yonder in Hartley Hall dwelt not only the dead or dying mother, whose image had filled her whole soul, but the implacable master of the house, who had shut his doors for ever even on his

own and only son, when *she* became his wife! And she knew and felt, with a dreadful spasm of despair, that this man was far less capable of pardon and pity, than of denying her access even to her mother's death-bed. At this horrible thought she shrieked out, twisting her hands together, and sinking on her knees to the bottom of the carriage. She seemed to see him before her, hard, cruel, with that evil eye, and that bad smile—the wicked magician of her childhood!

“Oh! let me come to her! let me come to her! Mamma! mamma! my darling!”

The poor French girl, not comprehending in the least, was terrified by the frantic horror of her tone and gestures, and put her arms round her, and raised her, with soothing and encouraging words. And so they sped on to the stone porch, mantled with ivy and roses, through which Helen Ashton had stolen from her mother's arms, through which Helen Hartley would now give her life to pass back to them!

All was very still in the sombre spring twilight, as the roll of the wheels and the trampling of the horses came to a stop before the porch.

There was no sound but the muffled barking of dogs shut up, and the great house seemed asleep or dead. But the doors were opened before the bell among the ivy could be pulled, and in the lighted outer hall two or three servants appeared. One came immediately to the carriage door, opened it silently, and let down the steps. Even then, Helen could not utter the fatal inquiry, but, arrived in the hall, turned her white face with its piteous eyes, and mutely moving lips, on the servants, grasping the edge of the table on which she leaned. They seemed to understand her:

“At half-past five this afternoon, ma'am,” said one of them in a low voice, the conventional tone of respectful regret.

Helen fell prone—into the arms of Elizabeth Tatt.

That good creature had run down at the sound of an arrival, just in time to hear the announcement, and catch

the fainting young lady. Worthy Tatt was embarrassed by the contradictory nature of her sensations. Joy at the sight of her dear Miss Helen, indignation at the solemn stupidity of the gentlemen in uniform, who now stood by, serenely staring at young Mrs. Hartley, as if she had fainted for their pastime. Tatt, looking unmitigated scorn, desired them to fetch some water, if they had sense enough to do that; then, addressing the little Frenchwoman as "my dear," invoked her aid, and carried her young mistress into the nearest room.

"Now my patience, Miss Helen, my dear, don't you give way like this."

So Tatt commenced, when Helen revived, and uttered a faint cry as she remembered the fatal words that had struck her down.

"It's all them stupids that give you such a turn. Why, your dear mamma's better, thank God, and not dangerous even. It's your step-papa that's took. Drink this, and I'll tell you about it. He'd been to Seabay, yesterday, to see his l'yer, they say; and he would ride that there young horse he was warned agin when he bought'n. And there—he was throwed with his head agin his own park-gate, as he come back home. The lodge folk—they saw it, of course, and pick'd'n up, and he was brought up here and the doctor rode for. But he never spoke no more, I believe, and died this afternoon. Here yesterday, and gone to-day, poor gentleman! like the grass in the Bible, Miss Helen; but it ain't your own blessed mamma, and we can't be too thankful for what we have received, my dear."

If honest Tatt had no hired tears to drop on the bier of Hartley, of Hartley Hall, his shade must have been consoled by the burst of decorous lamentations in the *Toxeter Gazette*.

The revulsion of feeling seemed at first to petrify poor Helen, who listened with wide, wild eyes fixed on her nurse's face; then, with an uncontrollable shriek, she had sprung from the arms of the two women, and was half-way upstairs, when her knees bent under her, and

she was forced to sit down, trembling. Then Tatt overtook her, and could represent the necessity of caution, and her mother's weak state.

And Helen was all submission, kissing Tatt, promising implicit obedience, with an imploring, child-like face.

Tatt went into the sick-room first, to prepare the invalid. But when Helen, standing by the open door, heard that dear voice once more, uttering her name in weak accents of tender, anxious joy, she darted in and sank on her knees by the bedside. Face to face, heart to heart, wrapped in each other's arms!—The mother has found this her child that was lost.

CHAPTER V.

AFFAIRS AT THE HALL.

EDWARD HARTLEY reached his ancestral halls on the following afternoon. Not being, like poor Helen, so far disturbed or absorbed by anxiety as to be incapable of rational reflection, he had, immediately on arriving at Toxeter, sought out the physician who would probably be in attendance at Hartley Hall. He thought it very desirable to ascertain what had been Helen's reception, before he proceeded thither himself.

For to his mind the strong probability *had* suggested itself, that neither he nor his wife might get farther than the outside of that ancient stone porch.

However, within two hours of his receiving the remarkable intelligence Dr. White had to give him, he was walking hastily towards the stairs across the inner hall at the Family Seat. Just then a door opened, and an unpleasant-looking old gentleman, all that your fancy might paint an elderly wolf in a white neckcloth—came prowling out of the late Mr. Hartley's study. This apparition greeted the present Mr. Hartley with a kind

of sternly mournful and reproachfully benign air of hospitality, that by no means charmed Edward.

"How do you do, Mr. Drewe?" said he, setting his right hand on the banisters, in a tone ostentatiously divested of sentiment, and ignoring sympathy. "I have just parted from your son John, who is in good health, you'll be glad to hear. I am going up now to see my family—so excuse me. Perhaps you'll do me the favour to call again some other day."

The reverend wolf bestowed on him a very wolfish grin of dubious import, after the manner of his defunct model upstairs, and spoke with impressive dignity, likewise a correct study from that lost original, but which, I assure you, any of us can achieve by talking in judicious capitals.

"I am Staying here at present, Edward. At the Dying request of my Lamented friend."

"Staying here!" quoth Edward, in frowning surprise.

"Till after the Funeral, Edward. Which will take place on Thursday next. After which the Will of my late Lamented Friend will be read. I have given all the necessary directions. Made all befitting arrangements. At the Dying request of Him who is Gone."

There was a certain ominous impertinence in the highly offensive manner as well as matter of this speech, which produced a horrible sensation, compounded of anger, disgust, and dread, in Edward's mind. An immense evil, looking all the more gigantic for its first vagueness, threatened him like a frightful phantom.

In a moment he perceived that this man held the secret of his worldly fortunes in his hand, and chose to torture him by this glimpse of it between his fingers, as it were. A sort of abuse of power, quite common and natural in the person who can fawn to obtain it. The proud young gentleman's heart swelled mightily; he neither questioned nor resented, nor asserted himself, but turned abruptly away, and ascended the two flights of stairs that led to his stepmother's door. And in the

few moments that ascent took, he had met his fate, ugly and cruel as it was, face to face; had confronted it, too, with that native hardihood which was not yet melted out of his character. He knew himself a disinherited man.

Helen was sitting at the foot of her mother's sofa, drawn near a pleasant open window. Mrs. Hartley had left her bed for the first time that day. Tatt had already warned them of the advent of Mr. Edward, whom she had caught a glimpse of through some door ajar, or from some landing. The young wife did not jump up and run to meet her husband; but she stopped speaking, and her features settled into a strange marble immobility, a fixed expression that was neither of joy nor tenderness. The maternal eyes saw, and were discreetly, reverently, withdrawn. Not even a mother must surprise the sacred marriage secrets of the heart. But this mother had already learned too much from her girl's face; and if the knowledge only confirmed fatal suspicions, long in existence, the certainty was not less heavy to bear for that. This man had, as she presaged, failed to make her child happy. Of course, she never doubted whose was the sole fault; *cela va sans dire*; and yet the warm-hearted impulsive little woman now achieved an immense victory over herself, in the fine wisdom and the strength of maternal love and prayer. When her son-in-law tapped at the door, and entered the room, she could hold out her hand to him. He first kissed that, and then her cheek, with the affectionate courtesy he had always shown her: then he made a step forward and put his lips to the white cheek of his statuesque wife, who moved not a line, hand, head, or feature.

He sat down and spoke in an extremely subdued tone with the widow, who could not help noticing his extraordinary pallor and haggardness, as well as the painful abstraction of his manner. Nor could she refer these tokens of suppressed emotion to the sudden death of his father, although, under the circumstances of estrangement and long silence, that might well have touched any filial chord which had not snapped in childhood. He alluded

to the event with perfect decorum and good taste, but in a manner which plainly evinced that there had been no dormant sentiment of affection or remorse to awaken. Was it possible that the coldness of his wife pained him? Was theirs but a lovers' quarrel after all?

Alas! this mother knew by heart every soft line of the darling face; for hours she had been swallowing her tears at the sight of that change which had come on it, and which comes not on a face so young in a day or week of misery, however sharp. There is something very afflicting, even to a stranger, in this cloudy air about a young creature. That *distrained* sorrowful look about the mouth!—you want to be telling her cheerful things to keep up the corners of it.

Edward's behaviour to his wife was unembarrassed, bordering certainly on something like good-natured indifference. There were no wistful glances stolen at her marble beauty, no betraying inflections of voice, those signs of tenderness that will always break from the full heart over the lips, in spite of repression, like the fruit-heavy sprays from an espalier. He did not remain long in the room, but said wearily he would go and sleep off the fatigue of his night and day journey, if he could. At the door he turned with the handle in his hand and asked carelessly:

"How long has Mr. Drewe been staying in the house?"

Then the widow said that he had sent up a message, offering to visit her in her room, which offer she had declined. He had thereupon sent up a second message, to the effect that, as *he* would attend to all necessary arrangements, all exertion on her part might therefore be spared. To which she had replied by a few written lines, thanking him civilly, but informing him that Mrs. Hartley (meaning Helen) had written to summon her husband, who would doubtless be speedily on the spot, to save Mr. Drewe the trouble he was so good as to propose taking.

"I find," said the widow, "that notwithstanding these plain hints, the man is still in the house, and has slept

here for three nights. But then you know, Edward, what an ill-mannered, officious person he always was."

Clearly, Edward's stepmother had not even a suspicion of that which was no longer matter of suspicion in his own mind. She did not dream of the revenge that Hartley, of Hartley Hall, had hugged in his dying arms in yonder chamber; and would wreak out of his family vault on this his only son, who had dared to dare him.

Edward heard her out gravely with no visible emotion, and then went away without speaking.

"How very pale he is, Helen," said the widow. "Is his health as good as ever?"

"Yes," replied Helen, coming into life out of her marble. "His health is very good. It is time for your chicken-broth, mamma."

It was not compatible with the truth of this history to represent the widow of the late Hartley as absorbed in grief at his decease, "weeping, weeping late and early." I think her honest sorrow for good Major Willie would have been dishonoured by such tears. She could do no more than cry for *him*. Ladies' tears have been compared by the poets to pearls and diamonds, but not, I believe, for this best reason—that the value of all these gems depends alike on their rarity. If diamonds were as plentiful as the dewdrops that lie on fat weed and flower, or the rain that falls on the just and the unjust, they would hardly be worth so much.

Before marriage, the late Mr. Hartley had appeared to pretty Mrs. Ashton a much better man than he was—a prenuptial delusion not uncommon. But the real man she found, as I may say, *behind* marriage, was very unlikely to appear better than he was, in his wife's eyes. Also, the late Mr. Hartley had thoroughly taken himself in with regard to that charming little woman. He had expected to do himself the pleasure of crushing her in the same mortar in which he had already, in a leisurely manner, brayed the first Mrs. Hartley to dust. But

Mrs. Louisa, you know, was not a woman to be so easily pulverized, actually or morally. The pair discovered their mutual blunder in a month or two of marriage, and certainly Mrs. Louisa made the best of a bad business.

Even the sagacious Montague Ashton had mistaken her character somewhat, when he predicted, as you will remember, a "stormy house at home." She knew it was her own fault that she found herself the wife of a man she must dislike, and could not respect, and she was not unjust enough to visit it on him. She would not be brayed in his mortar; she did not consider it necessary to expiate her blunder by that martyrdom; but he really had in his second wife a far more useful, ornamental, and generally effective household article than that first poor inferior bit of mechanism which had tumbled to pieces in his rough handling.

He was just the man, this late Hartley, to kill you off any amount of meek tearful wives that were dutifully extinguishable. But Mrs. Hartley did not think it her duty to go into her closet, and cry away her eyelashes—precisely because her husband was not worth crying for—and then "receive him, when he came, with a welcome fond as ever." She had chirped that sentimental doctrine in her time to Captain Ashton, and had fully believed that she should act up to it, if the adored one should ever turn out a brute. But then, as we know, she was never put to the test, and was never likely to have been so by honest Willie, who, if he had been spared, was more likely, on the whole, to have lived to be hen-pecked. Her second husband she had never professed those extreme sentiments for, so that this Griseldis theory remained an abstract proposition, like that of the "sordid dross."

I know some persons have such a bad opinion of a wife's position, that they think it their duty to be awed by a Jovial frown of her liege lord. But I also know that many a woman's fond heart drops off from her husband at some wanton demand on her humility, some stupid stretch of marital arrogance. Be assured, my

dear sir, you cannot do a more ridiculous thing than to *frown* at your wife. If you *must* ill-use her, I advise you to lock her up, starve her, beat her, or—laugh at her. There is no middle course. A pompous husband is about as terrible as a ghost made of a turnip. How can you imagine any woman worth twopence awed by such a bugaboo?

Mrs. Hartley had not been happy under the solemn oppression of the late Grinston; she had not lost a regrettable husband; and so all her heart was now occupied with one great yearning over her sorrowful child.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. DREWE-NETTLEFOLD.

THE day of the funeral arrived. The preceding week had for Edward Hartley dragged slowly, with its burden of bitter anticipations. He had not felt much of the pains of suspense, however. The amputation of his inheritance was to him a *fait accompli*, and he was only struggling, manfully enough, to face his crippled future. Waiting here for the formal announcement "was to him" like waiting for the *dénoûment* of a drama when he knew it already. But he did not choose to betray, by any hasty act or word, how deep and dire was the revenge of his dead father, and how desperate was the natural trouble of his mind. He spent these days mostly alone, or with his wife and her mother, in the sitting-room adjoining the bedchamber of the latter. Helen stayed with her mother day and night. She hardly left her a moment, and the widow saw plainly enough that her daughter avoided the least chance of being alone with her husband. Even any accidental *rencontre* she guarded against, by ascertaining that he was in the house before she left it, to take air and exercise in the garden. But she never complained of unhappiness in

her marriage : and never spoke at all of her husband, unless her mother did so first, and then in the least significant manner possible. But this avoidance, this silence, were trumpet-tongued to the mother. Her precious girl was but too surely another poor young creature who had set her life on a die and lost the cast.

Now, Edward was not at all unkind, much less uncivil to his wife. His manner to her contrasted quite favourably with her undeniably chilling demeanour towards her husband. The widow could not bear to own this even to herself ; felt herself a disloyal mother to her darling even in the passing thought of such an admission. But it made her capable of maintaining a cordial behaviour towards her son-in-law, which all her resolutions and efforts might not have availed to keep up, had she detected any tyranny or positive unkindness in his treatment of his wife, or had Helen carried herself more like a meek, loving, put-upon Griseldis. Two things quite different and separate the widow also perceived. First, that Edward, who seldom troubled himself to affect a feeling, really liked *her*. And, second, that the young man had some immense weight of care, some disastrous circumstance, on his mind, that was entirely absorbing it. She could not help saying to her daughter one day :

"I am afraid your husband is very unhappy about something. But no doubt, Helen, you know the cause, and that it is nothing so very serious after all."

Whereupon Helen's eyes flashed a momentary lightning.

"Oh, yes," said she, with a bitter little smile, "I know. Don't make yourself uneasy about him, mamma."

She was quite sure she knew. For it was but a little while yet since the handsome Contessa, the last reigning Queen, had hung weeping, invoking the sympathy of her saints, on the neck of Helen's husband, in the tender agony of a parting embrace. A parting embrace, there in his own garden, that Italian night, almost under the balcony of his wife's chamber, with a contempt of con-

cealment that was really due rather to selfish thoughtlessness than audacity and cruelty.

But the poor young wife was wrong. The handsome Contessa had been out of sight just four days sooner than out of mind with her English adorer. Even now, my poor Helen, you don't know the scope of your lord's genius for grand passions. The handsome Contessa his *last*! Waste not your jealousy on the handsome preterpluperfect Contessa! All *that* happened four months ago, and since then a grand passion that you know nothing about has budded, blown, and dropped; also a couple of passionets, besides that first green tender shoot which began to push at Les Étangs.

But it was, as we are aware, no sentimental trouble that oppressed Edward Hartley now, though neither of the two women in whose sight he was living guessed at the real source of it, or had the remotest suspicion of the common catastrophe in the family affairs. Mrs. Hartley, who thought at any time so little about "dross," probably because she had never been more than threatened with the real want of it, had attached small importance to Mr. Hartley's renunciation of his only son, in a pecuniary point of view. She had believed it very likely that he would never forgive Edward or see him again, and would let his last sun go down on his wrath, as he had verily done. But any idea that Edward would not inherit the family estate never took the least hold on her mind. If you had recalled to her that her own father had disinherited *her*, she would probably have answered, womanly, that it was quite different. She was a daughter, not a son. Besides her father *had* forgiven her after all, and very likely might leave her his money—not that she wanted it. As for Helen, she had truly had no room in her agitated mind and disappointed heart for any but the short-lived hopes and joys, fears and despairs, of sentiment. However, she certainly took it for granted that her husband, being the only son of his father, would, as a matter of course, succeed him at Hartley Hall. She had not even comprehended the

question about the entail, as we know. Edward uttered no hint of the real state of affairs, having no purpose, however, in this silence, except to spare himself the pain of speaking on a bitterly painful subject.

Meanwhile, the reverend gentleman downstairs had the whole suite of reception rooms to himself, and dined in much state, in the great squirearchal dining-room, on the fat of the land and its curious old port, and surrounded by the family portraits. In general, these ancestral Hartleys looked extremely indifferent to his presence, and appeared to be simpering among themselves at some family joke with which the chaplain had nothing to do. But one or two gentlemen, in iron clothes with very white lights, stared at him rather arrogantly with their left hands on their hips; and one venerable pig-tailed squire, extremely like George the Third, looked as puzzled at the parson as the historical anecdote represents his blessed majesty on the famous dumpling question. One or two of the Hartley ladies smiled rather wickedly at the ecclesiastic, out of very low gowns, and looked no more severe than their draperies.

On the eve of the day which the reverend master of the ceremonies had fixed for the funeral, there was an arrival at the Hall. An arrival that surprised and offended the widow, by whom it was totally unexpected, but which was destined to enlighten Edward Hartley considerably, on a point which had not hitherto been so clear to him as his own share in the coming *dénoûment*.

Mr. and Mrs. Drewe-Nettlefold arrived, were received in the porch with respectful consideration by the Vicar of Hartleybridge, and by him obsequiously conducted to the apartments which had been prepared for them under his own superintendence. Now, Mr. Drewe-Nettlefold was, you will remember, the son of the Reverend Mr. Drewe, and brother of John at Les Étangs. He was also the heir-at-law of our late friend, Mr. Nettlefold, of Nettlefold Court, who, you will deeply regret to learn, expired in the arms of his attached and accomplished lady about two years before this time.

"But who do you think is *Mrs. Drewe-Nettlefold*, Edward?" said *Mrs. Louisa*, not yet in the least suspiciously, however: "why, she is a kind of cousin of yours! You recollect your grandmother?"

"I lament to say I do," replied poor Edward, forcing a smile.

"Well, she had, you know, one sister, who married a *Mr. Willoughby*, and died ages before you were born. She left a son, and this is his daughter. She is older than you, I think, but was only married to this *Mr. Drewe-Nettlefold* about six months ago. And then, to my astonishment, your father invited them here! There has been a family quarrel with these people ever since your grandmother died, I fancy; squabbles about her money, I suppose. I concluded the invitation was to please that disagreeable man at the Vicarage (or rather downstairs), who was more than ever with *Mr. Hartley* of late. I used to wish," said the widow, dropping her voice, "that he had been a *good* clergyman."

So she talked, and, from behind the shutter she had unbarred, let in a flood of dreary light on poor Edward.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WILL OF A RESPECTABLE SINNER.

THE funeral was over, and had been quite an imposing spectacle, as arranged by the pious care of the Vicar of *Hartleybridge*. When county families have a marrying, or a burying, they are bound to make a county sight of it; it is among the duties they recognise. Even Death cannot be permitted to shovel away county people like common people, and some dust must be consigned to dust with all that expensive respect due to dust with a difference.

Several county neighbours had attended the mournful ceremony, and three or four returned to the Hall, having

been invited to be present at the reading of the will. No one liked to refuse this token of amity to the heir; and not one of them had the least doubt that this was the dead man's only son. It was known pretty generally that Edward had not been on terms with his father since his stolen marriage; though why it had been stolen nobody could exactly make out, or what objection old Hartley had had to make to his wife's daughter, already known among them as a charming and beautiful young girl, hardly woman-grown.

But it was all over now, and the neighbours came there as much to inaugurate the son as to bury the father; and comported themselves as Edward's guests, pressing his hand with congratulatory condolences. He, for his part, behaved with a grave and passive courtesy, as well as a touch of sternness in his face and manners, which became him well, and were very unlike the haughty petulance, or languid flippancy, usually characterizing them.

The will was to be read in a handsome room, called the study because the walls were partly covered with books, framed and glazed, and which had been the private bower of the defunct Grinston. Here, then, the county folks (there were an Earl, a Baronet, a Squire, a Dean, and a Doctor), marshalled by the Vicar, seated themselves in expectant silence, conscious of no particular emotion, probably, except an inconvenient desire to yawn. Mr. Drewe-Nettlefold (who was an immensely fat man of thirty-three, with the round head and doughy face of a pastry-fed little boy) deposited himself, with a great sigh, on a very small chair, which immediately set up a plaintive creak, and continued to emit the same throughout the scene, at every movement of its oppressor. The family lawyer from Seabay placed himself at the library table in the window, and there ensued a pause.

Edward alone remained standing, near the chimney-piece, but quite clear of that or any other support. He frowned a little, but that might be in consequence of the full glare of the light from the window, which he seemed

to have purposely faced. He had not often in his life found himself in this study, and he had none but unpleasant associations with it. He had never entered it but to experience some injudicious harshness, or abuse of parental power; he knew it as the private room of the father who had been nothing to his son, child or man, but a tyrant, and whose unnatural and little provoked revenge aimed now to crush him even from the grave!

By a strong effort the young man had obtained a perfect control over himself as to outward appearance, and was fully prepared to meet the coming blow. But his thoughts, during this pause in the action of the drama, wavered in spite of the strong tension of his mind, or rather, perhaps, because of it—as a hand vibrates that is nervously clenched and extended. He found himself examining quite curiously the portrait of his redoubtable grandmother, which hung in the middle of the opposite wall, and was the only picture in the room, except a small oval one of a great-grandmother. He dimly remembered both effigies, though he had never taken so much notice of either as he did at this singularly inappropriate moment. The little portrait represented a pretty blue-eyed piquante sort of *petite marquise*, with an abundance of fair hair turned up, and a string of large pearls coiling through the soft mass. Just a face that Watteau might have given to one of his satin shepherdesses; glancing teeth, red lips, eyes slightly prominent, brows arched and open, nose sharp, straight, white, and well defined—expression rather meretricious. Edward now remembered his childish wonder at the monstrous *coiffure*, which, after all, was extremely elegant, and the very frame, which was square, with a string of gilt beads round the oval. He even found himself half smiling at the contrast of the other picture. That terrible old lady could never have submitted to the neighbourhood of the poor dear little leering great-grandmother, but that she had been a Lady Betty, and therefore privileged. As it was, she herself sat scowling, as if under protest, in a high-backed arm-chair, a red Bible

on her lap, which she gripped with both her claws. Edward actually found himself secretly chuckling over the aloe bitterness of the old lady's *musàta*, just as the door, opening, admitted the reverend Peter, handing in, with obsequious and solemn ceremony, his august daughter-in-law, Mrs. Drewe-Nettlefold. Everybody stood up when the lady entered, and Mrs. Drewe-Nettlefold, making a nervous curtsy, hurried to a seat in the immediate neighbourhood of her lord. She was a very plain, lean little lady, with a scalded-looking complexion, and painfully flaxen hair in long prim curls. She was clad in mourning of the absolutely inconsolable degree, her dress having a prodigious development of crape. Her unexpected appearance surprised and puzzled the county neighbours, who continued to wonder what she did in that *galère*, even after her reverend father-in-law had solemnly proclaimed her the Cousin, once removed, of our late Lamented friend. Most of them knew this already, as the lady all in black had appeared among them before, all in white, on her marriage, about six months previously.

However, this petty perplexity was speedily swallowed up in the shock that ensued on the astounding announcements of the Will, which the lawyer now proceeded to read.

For lo! by this will the whole of the late Hartley's family property, that he could not take into the family vault with him in his coffin-plate and handles, was devised to that lean little lady in inconsolable black, whose business there at such a time they had ventured to question! She had nothing to do to qualify herself for representing all the Hartleys, of Hartley Hall, but to accept the name as well as the estate of her late beneficent cousin once removed. The estates, which, with the Coniscombe additions, were now worth more than £9,000 a year, were only charged with the jointure of the widow lady upstairs (a jointure of £250 per annum!), except, indeed, a little legacy of £3,000, and certain valuable personal property, bequeathed, as a mark of esteem, to the testator's faithful friend, the Reverend Peter Drewe.

That holy man sat by, trying hard to look clergymanly and guileless, disinterested and deprecating; the wolfish grin crawling, in spite of him, over his unpleasant face, with its protruding lower jaw and pale felonious eye.

An irrepressible "Bless my soul!" and a stifled "Halloo!" from lord and squire, and knight of the shire, had alone interrupted the silence of the sitting, with the exception, to be sure, of Mr. Drewe-Nettlefold's justly complaining little chair.

When all was read, and the lawyer had refolded his manuscript, no one moved or spoke for a full minute. Then there was a general stir and rising; and then one of the county neighbours (it was Sir James Baldwin), bowed to the lady particularly, to the rest generally, and straightway turning to the disinherited son, still standing there bravely erect, grasped him by the hand heartily, warmly, fatherly. The worthy baronet said but a short sentence in an under-tone, but his kindly old brown eyes had a glitter in them that was better than many words; and after that he instantly left the room. Then each one of the county gentlemen present, grey-haired men, and fathers of sons whom they loved, followed Sir James's example silently; and, lastly, Edward himself, saluting, with perfect courtesy and self-possession, the Mistress of Hartley Hall, her husband, and her guests, quietly quitted the room also. He has passed the ordeal like a man, and like a fine young English gentleman, landless though he be.

In the hall he found Sir James Baldwin walking up and down. The rest were going or gone. The baronet took him by the arm, and drew him into a little room that opened from the hall, and was chiefly occupied by guns and fishing-rods. What he said matters little to this story; it was but the amplification of the four words he had spoken in the study. And those were, "Come home with me."

Sir James's eldest son had been, you will remember, Edward Hartley's schoolfellow and college comrade.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JEWEL IN THE TOAD'S HEAD.

BUT Edward could not yet slacken the bow-string. He walked straight upstairs into his stepmother's room, and said to the two women who were sitting there in their new mourning:

"My father's will has been read, and I am ashamed to think of the miserable pittance he was not ashamed to assign to his widow."

"My dear Edward," said Mrs. Hartley, "it will do very well. When Uncle Montague told me, long ago, I said it would do very well. You see I have no very expensive tastes. I never did care much about money, even when I was a young girl, with life before me. £250 a year will give me all I need. Don't vex yourself."

"£250, mamma!" cried Helen, indignant: and, forgetting even her studied reticence towards her husband, turned to him with flashing eyes—"And how much have you, Edward?"

"NOTHING, Helen," said he, looking her in the face. "My father has fulfilled his threat. I am a disinherited Prince. The crown of these realms encircles the lint-white locks of our well-beloved cousin, twice removed—the lady downstairs: Mrs. Drewe-Nettlefold that was, Queen Hartley that is. My dear mamma," added Edward, with a kind of affectionate irony, "I should not have come up here to sympathize with you about your £250 a year, if my father had not cut me out of £9,000."

Both women understood him, but only one shook hands with him, looking kindly on him through tearful eyes, in that trying hour—and it was not his wife.

But Edward misunderstood Helen's immobility. She really did not and could not appreciate the extent of the pecuniary calamity that had befallen them. Her thoughts were preoccupied with distresses that youth is apt to

consider supreme. She knew even less about money matters than her mother had ever done. Edward had been the only pursebearer of the young couple, and she had seldom paid, or possessed the means of paying, for any but the merest trifles of even her own current expenses. She had never looked on this as a hardship, but the contrary. Yet it might have been all the better for her moral state had she been forced to cast up accounts, and deprived of the baneful leisure to condole with herself, petting the misery of her heart.

"But," says Mrs. Hartley presently, after a little pause of strangling indignation, "one comfort is, you will never really want money, Edward. Of course, I know it's so very hard, poor fellow, to give up your rightful inheritance, and this nice old place, and everything you have been brought up to expect. But you are sure to succeed in any course of life you like to take; and you are only twenty-seven yet; and, after all, how much nobler to rise to eminence by the talents God has so bountifully bestowed on you, and how much prouder we shall be of you."

So she ran on, in her sanguine sympathizing, feminine way, her generous heart warming towards Edward, injured and unfortunate, till she almost began to blame herself for taking his faults for granted, and prejudging the husband of her sad-faced Helen.

"But now," said her stepson, "I must tell you and Helen of a resolution I have taken, which I fear you may both condemn and complain of, but it is unalterable. I shall no longer accept an allowance from my wife's uncle. As long as I took for granted, as I have been fool enough to do, that she was to share my wealth some day, I felt it no degradation that we should live meanwhile on Mr. Ashton's bounty. Perhaps I ought to have done so. I half think it already. Poor men get so prickly proud. At any rate, it would be degradation, and shameful enough, if now, having no inheritance whatever to expect, I did not at once undertake to maintain my wife and myself. I have, as you justly say, mamma, youth, health,

and fair abilities, fairly educated, and I shall certainly not shirk my work now it is put before me, or allow another man to help me with the fruits of his own. Helen has married a penniless man, and must abide it: she took me for better for worse, and must put up with the worst now it's come."

Harsh as the words sounded, Helen honoured her husband for speaking them more than she had ever yet truly done, and they gave her more pleasure than words of his had given her for many a day. Only she repeated to herself, "*The worst! this!*"

She was silent, but only for half a minute, to stifle impulse, and speak calmly.

The poor girl overshot her mark, and made a prim little sententious speech, that irritated her husband.

"Of course, Edward, at your age, and with your advantages, you must rely on yourself alone; you must learn to labour now the time is come to labour."

"Learn and labour truly to get my own (and wife's) living, and do my duty in that state of pocket, &c. Oh, my catechec and my grandmamme! Methinks, while you speak, I hear the rustle of her sable skirts."

"But, Edward," said Mrs. Hartley, alarmed and rather bewildered, while Helen walked away and sat down with a swelling heart. [Ah, a man should never revenge himself by sarcasm on the woman who has hurt or offended him: it is a weapon he should be ashamed to use—too much like whipping her!] "But, Edward, I don't know what you mean exactly. I don't doubt you will succeed, and win money and distinction, and all that; but, *meantime*—for a year or two—you and Helen must eat, you know. If you are even too proud to accept Uncle Montague's help any longer, you don't mean to say you won't have any of my money. Of course, you don't mean *that*."

"Forgive me for frightening you," said Edward, with a smile. "Certainly we won't have any of your poor little money. But look here, mamma; here's a letter from an old friend of mine, who is a great gun among the news-

papers. He holds out to me every hope of an engagement on a daily paper. That will give Helen bread, even if she must lay down butter for the present. Coraggio! mamma."

"But Edward," said the widow again, "how comes your friend to write to you about this? How could he imagine you would need such an appointment, just coming into your fortune?"

Then Edward told them, at last, how the certainty that he was disinherited had come to him, even as he re-entered Hartley Hall, and through the stinging insolence of his old tutor's demeanour; and how he had—with, we must allow, a brave and manly prudence—immediately taken what steps he could to provide for the worst, which he had never doubted was at hand. The two women knew now what had been in his face, perplexing and grieving one of them, and with the rash haste of jealousy, laid to the handsome preterpluperfect Contessa by the other.

Future plans were now arranged. Mrs. Hartley had already heard from her father, who had lately resided entirely at Danhaye Park, and was become very infirm, was indeed partially paralysed. Mrs. Nettlefold had, since her own bereavement, kindly taken up her abode with her invalid brother, and undertook to rock the cradle of his declining age. She read and answered all his letters, managed his business matters, and saved him all earthly trouble; so that he had really nothing whatever to do but to "make his sowl" and die happy, leaving all his money to the admirable and devoted Letitia.

Mrs. Hartley had received a letter (in answer to Helen's announcement of Mr. Hartley's death), dictated by the old colonel to his servant, who had never before written to her for him. Louisa wondered a little not to get one of Mrs. Nettlefold's pious and affectionate cream-laid missives, on this favourable occasion, but presently guessed that her father had stolen a march on his vigilant guardian, when she read the really eager and pressing invitation that accompanied his decorous condolences.

He urged her coming immediately to pay him a long visit at Danhaye, earnestly representing the benefit her health and spirits would receive from her native air.

In the five years that had passed since Louisa had asked and obtained her father's pardon, visits had been once exchanged between Park Lane and Hartley Hall. But the aged colonel and his respectable son-in-law did not get on very well together, and the civilities between them had been of the most distant kind. Also, Colonel Danhaye had maintained a profound silence on the subject of his testamentary dispositions; and the old sisterly intervention had still availed to keep parent and daughter from any very intimate intercourse, even when their relations seemed re-established.

Mrs. Louisa was a changed little woman or she might have declined her old father's invitation, withheld by that resentful pride which so long stifled filial love and duty. She might have been afraid that if she obeyed her father's call, and went back to be a daughter to him in his infirm old age, her motives would certainly be set down as interested, by her aunt, who would as certainly so misrepresent them to her father. Especially when the comparative poverty to which her wealthy husband had consigned her could be adduced, to bear out and back those insinuations. But Louisa had come into a clearer moral atmosphere and daylight since that storm and darkness through which she had passed when her own child had deceived and forsaken her. She humbly acknowledged her own offences, her heart yearned to her old father, and she saw her duty to him so plainly, that no redoubtable Mrs. Grundy, in the polite form of Mrs. Nettlefold, had any longer power to scare her from it.

It was settled, therefore, that the next day Edward, his wife, and his father's widow should go to town together, and that the latter should proceed thence, after a night's rest, to Danhaye Park.

While they dined, a note was brought from Sir James Baldwin and Lady Jane, still more earnestly inviting Edward and his wife to Broadleigh, in a few hasty, hearty

words. This invitation did Edward moral good, though it was declined: the thought of this fatherly hand held out to the disinherited young man warmed his heart—it was the first sparkle of the jewel in the toad's head.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN ROBERT HARTLEY.

ABOUT three months after the death of Griunston Hartley, of Hartley Hall, Mrs. Nettlefold-Hartley, who reigned there in his stead, was seated by her drawing-room fire-side alone after dinner. She was sitting bolt upright, with her stiff little back against a stiff-backed little chair, and, though her eyes were shut, no one would have guessed, to look at her, that she was fast asleep. But those principles of uprightness imbibed in our tender years are, I have been assured, the most ineradicable, and the virtue of spinal inflexibility had been severely enforced at the expensive Kensington school which had turned out Mrs. Nettlefold-Hartley. So that the habit of sitting with the grace of a poker had become second nature to that flaxen-headed young woman, whom even slumber never surprised into limpness.

She was so fast asleep that she did not hear the entrance of a servant, and a visitor at his heels; and the footman was driven not only to repeat his announcement of "a gentleman," in a much less discreet voice, but to knock down a chair by accident before he could break the repose of his mistress.

Then she opened her eyes, and perceived a tall and dusty gentleman standing before her in the act of making a bow. Whereupon she stood up all in one straight piece, and seemed to curtsy herself straighter still.

"I beg your pardon," said the tall gentleman, in a very mild voice; "I am afraid I have disturbed you. I

am Captain Robert Hartley, the late Mr. Hartley's brother."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Nettlefold-Hartley, with repellent dryness, though she really meant to be quite civil, and added, "Won't you sit down?"

Captain Hartley sat down.

"I am just returned from abroad," he recommenced, "and the tidings of my poor brother's death having reached me as I was on the point of sailing for England, I naturally hastened here the first moment I was free after my arrival. Do you think my brother's widow will see me this evening?"

"No," said Mrs. Nettlefold-Hartley, without in the least intending to be comic. "She isn't here."

"I am very sorry for that," said Robert Hartley; "I asked for Mrs. Hartley, and I see the servants supposed I meant my nephew's wife."

"They supposed you meant *me*," said the stiff little lady with the prim flaxen curls, getting more repellent every moment. She was in reality becoming exceedingly nervous and embarrassed, as she perceived that the whole history of her accession to the throne of those realms was still a sealed book to her visitor, and as she began to fear it was her uncomfortable destiny to open it for him.

"I beg your pardon," said Robert Hartley, looking thoroughly perplexed; "may I ask whom I have the honour of speaking to?"

At this instant the door opened, and Mr. Nettlefold-Hartley flung his bulkiness into the room, like a hippopotamus rolling into a tank; whereupon his wife, with secret transport, but unmoved aspect, hastened to introduce him to their unconscious guest.

"My husband, Mr. Nettlefold-Hartley — Captain Robert Hartley, the late Mr. Hartley's brother;" and immediately washed her hands of the impending explanation, having hoisted the burden of it on the vast shoulders of her spouse. That uncomfortably big young man smiled in his fat way, bowed with an alarming

forward lurch, and seated himself on a small sofa, which immediately broke down under him.

"I hope you are not hurt, my dear?" said Mrs. Nettlefold-Hartley, with much placid politeness.

"Not at all, thank you," said Mr. Nettlefold-Hartley, heaving himself up, with the help of Captain Hartley's hand, and speaking with the unmoved self-possession of a man well used to such little accidents. In fact, he was much too big for ordinary upholstery, and he seemed to have lost all control over his own great limbs, which were for ever crashing down unexpectedly somewhere, flattening, smashing, and spreading havoc and ruin around them.

In the meantime, Robert Hartley had been sinking deeper into the depths of mystification.

"I—I don't quite comprehend," he said, hesitating; "may I ask if you are—if you are visiting my nephew and his wife?"

"Bless me!" said the big young man, "don't you know?"

But again the door opened, and an elderly individual, of elaborately clerical aspect, walked up to Robert Hartley, and said with a curiously wolfish smile:

"How do you do, Captain Hartley?"

Mr. Drewe had dined at Hartley Hall that day; he dined there most days; and passing through the hall just now, had espied a carpet-bag there, labelled with Captain Hartley's name.

"Ah," said that officer, recognising the bland vicar by his voice chiefly, and unspeakably relieved by the sight of even *his* known face at last, "I am glad to see you, Mr. Drewe. How are your sons?"

Then you have not recognised William," returned the clergyman, affably. "It is indeed long since you visited this locality. This is my eldest son, who was his uncle Nettlefold's heir, you know."

"I recollect now," observed Robert Hartley, "but—but—this lady named him as Nettlefold-*Hartley*, I thought. I dare say I mistook—I am nervous and stupid."

"Mr. Drewe," interrupted the stiff little lady, from her stiff little chair, quite eagerly for her, and with manifest trepidation, "perhaps after Captain Hartley has eaten something (Will you ring, my dear ?), you will beg him to go into my husband's study with you, and explain matters to him. He does not appear to be aware—to know the circ—to know *anything*."

"I am not at all hungry, thank you," rejoined Robert Hartley; "but I shall be greatly obliged for the explanation you offer, for I am quite bewildered."

Mr. Drewe, nothing loth, led the way to his son's study, and Robert Hartley followed him silently to that well-known room. *His* filial associations with it were far different from his nephew Edward's. *He* had known it as his tender father's sanctum, his own harbour of refuge in his worse than motherless childhood, and entered it now with full heart and eyes. And there did Mr. Drewe, with blandly triumphant pomposity, fully explain to him the present surprising state of things at Hartley Hall. Robert listened without uttering a word, after the first exclamation of astonishment into which he was startled. Indeed, he at last appeared to have fallen into a train of thought entirely apart from that slow stream of eloquence which flowed from the lips of the Reverend Peter, and sat with his elbows on the table and his chin between his finger and thumb, staring at that divine, too evidently without seeing or hearing him. Quite suddenly at last he started up, and hastily wished Mr. Drewe good night. His abruptness took that reverend person very much aback, but before he could arrange his ideas of its unseemliness into words and capitals big enough for the occasion, Robert Hartley was out in the quiet night, and his long legs were striding down the park, his carpet-bag swinging as he went.

He had dismissed the fly that brought him from the Toxeter station, and now intended to go back to that venerable city with as little delay as would be occasioned by hiring a conveyance at the "Hartley Arms." Poor

affectionate child-hearted Robert Hartley might well have thought a thousand sad thoughts of the past, or dwelt on the few remembered gleams of love and happiness that had pierced the gloom of his early years, as he traversed those familiar haunts. But in truth his mind and heart were so full of a present idea and purpose, that there seemed no room for retrospection. He left the carriage-way at a little distance from the porch, and struck across the park, instinctively taking the short cut to the Toxeter-road lodges, with a fond unforgetting knowledge of the localities about him. He strode on unerringly under black vaults built by the meeting branches of the grand park trees, thick with August. The darkness seemed like light, as he emerged into clear spaces of sward, among the silhouettes of a wide landscape that rose and fell against the glimmering horizon; and making for the twin stars that twinkled in the lodge casements, he passed the gates without a backward look at the domain so dear to him.

The "Hartley Arms" was nearly the first house at this end of the village: he slipped, still with familiar foot, into a little side room by the door, and requested a fashionable young woman in a blue silk gown, whom he saw in the passage, to get him a fly immediately. There was no one left in the "Hartley Arms" to recognise this time and care-worn son of the Hall, except the aged landlady, who lay bedridden in her lavendered sheets upstairs, and who had abdicated in favour of her daughter, the young person who walked in silk attire, and siller had to spare, and who was the scornful village Beauty and heiress.

In twenty minutes Robert Hartley was on his way back to Toxeter; but arriving there at half-past eleven o'clock, was constrained to own to himself he had better go to bed in the hotel, and postpone further proceedings till the next morning.

Next morning as eight chimed he was already in the green suburbs of the city, and plunging into the mouth of a bowery by-road.

In a short time Robert Hartley reached a green door in a lofty ivy-clothed wall, and rang the bell. The door being opened directly by a man in his shirt-sleeves, with a rake over his shoulder, the visitor began to demand: "Is Mr. Hal—?" and was immediately interrupted by an exclamation of well-pleased surprise from the individual he addressed, who pulled him violently over the threshold, and shut the garden-door behind him, and who was the Reverend George Hallet himself.

"This is very pleasant," said Captain Hartley, half an hour after, being seated at a breakfast-table in a pleasant room, whose old-fashioned bay window, shaded by venetians partly closed, gave on a pleasant lawn and flower-garden, delicious with summer breadths of shadow, light, and colour. We know poor Robert Hartley's simple delight in these homely circumstances of time and place. The wide and wide-open bay window was so near the ground, that Mrs. Hallet's little pet terrier, with ridiculously short legs, could scramble in and out on any imaginary mission of inspection or tour of duty about the premises, that appeared ever and anon suddenly to occur to his mind in his sleep, as he lay in a yellow curl on his mistress's lilac muslin skirts.

Outside, the exquisitely trim garden, bounded by depths of shrubbery, and by the high mellow old brick wall, almost hidden on this side by flowering creepers, sloped down to the tops of orchard trees and the undulating summer landscape—Toxeter, its grey Cathedral, and broadly flowing river, about a mile off.

Mr. Hallet had married his first love, a very pretty young lady, about twelve years ago, when he had been presented to the living of Toxeford by the mother of one of the "rich young men" he had prepared for college. And for more than college, as the mother of his fatherless pupil thankfully felt and acknowledged.

I have no intention of saying much about Mrs. Hallet—not that I do not like and admire her, but that she would find no room on my little stage, already crowded, as it is, by personages that are more or less necessary to

my drama. She belonged to a certain type, and a very charming one, I think, of Englishwoman that is pretty sure to be a clergyman's wife—what the good father Ripa called an "English priestess," in recording his first sight of one. Or, if she is not a clergyman's wife, she ought to be; she has somehow missed her vocation, her career is *manquée*. There is somewhere a parish and parish schools, a parsonage and a parson that belong to her; and perhaps the wrong woman has got them all; but generally you will find the right woman in the right place. Do you ever walk through a strange village, or little country town, and meet the clergyman's wife without recognising her? Don't you feel sure she is the lady who looks at you benevolently, but a little sharply, as one having authority? Don't you feel directly that this lady, well-bred, modest, of excellent tone, "civil-suited," moral-looking—this thoroughly English lady, is the "priestess" of the place? She is pretty sure to be dressed in lilac muslin, if it is summer; unless it is Sunday, in which case she will be in violet silk, or black moiré, very thick and handsome. Her ribbons will always be white, and her collar and cuffs of the daintiest, and never soiled or rumpled. And she is almost certain to be good-looking.

After breakfast, Robert Hartley and Mr. Hallet were closeted in the parson's study for an hour, and at the end of that time they had by no means come to an agreement on the subject under discussion. A folded paper lay on the table between them.

"No," said Robert Hartley, "don't try to persuade me it is my duty to do otherwise than I have resolved. If it were, why does my conscience tell me the contrary?"

"Your conscience does not tell you the contrary," said Mr. Hallet, rather impatiently; "you are simply a monomaniac; an amiable monomaniac, my dear friend, and have been mad on this subject any time these ever so many years that I have known anything of you."

Poor Robert Hartley smiled his old kind guileless smile at the clergyman, and replied, after a moment:

"Look here, Hallet; I have tried—sincerely tried, to see things as you would have me; but it is stronger than me. The old feeling always comes back, with an irresistible force that cannot be my own. It is stronger than me, Hallet."

"Of course it is—all evil is stronger than we are; but it is not stronger than God, my good sir."

"Hallet," said poor Robert Hartley, getting much agitated, and hardly taking in what his friend said, "you must have been surprised I did not know you when you opened the door, although you recognised me directly. Hallet, I am going blind. I *was* blind for months last year on the coast of Africa, and the doctor told me the malady would return, and probably terminate in a total loss of sight."

"I pray God not so, my dear Hartley; you must consult first-rate oculists without delay. As yet you have only the opinion and condemnation of your board-ship doctor, I suppose?"

Robert Hartley still seemed too full of his own thoughts to listen. He hurriedly drew to him a Bible which lay on the table, and, turning the leaves, found a particular page. He laid his hand on it, and looking up, said, with a faltering voice and colouring all over his thin wan face, "You won't laugh at me, Hallet?"

"Laugh!" said the clergyman; "I was never farther from it."

Hartley pushed over the Bible to him, his forefinger pressed on a text.

"*'Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall go out in obscure darkness.'* When I was going blind in Africa I came on that, one day; I was groping about for comfort in this book, and *that* seemed to answer me, like a terrible voice from heaven!"

"My dear, dear Hartley —"

"Do you think I could place myself in the position you advise, when I am thus made to feel my great crime, and that my place should only be the last and lowest? How could I ever reconcile myself to take an honoured

and prominent position? I think my consciousness of my real deserts would make it a punishment greater than I could bear! I have learned to be content and grateful, and to look back without despair, feeling that God sees the humbleness of my heart, and the sincerity of my remorse, and that my sole reliance is on His pardon, and my sole hope in His promises."

Mr. Hallet was too much affected by the faltering tone and working face to answer directly. This lifelong agony of remorse, this lifelong superstition and mistake, was made too touching by its profound sincerity to be derided, or untenderly dealt with. Before the clergyman could speak, Robert Hartley recommenced, in a calmer tone:

"Just now you spoke of my consulting a first-rate oculist: I have done so, three days since in London."

"And he said?—"

"That I shall be blind," said Hartley, fixing those dim eyes on his friend. "My 'lamp will go out in obscure darkness,'" and added instantly: "God's will be done!"

"Amen," said Hallet; but also: "May God avert this trouble!"

After that the clergyman ceased to urge his friend to the course of conduct he had before so strenuously advocated, though with arguments that had failed to move him; and contented himself with asking what Captain Hartley had determined to do in the matter under discussion.

"I mean to find out my nephew the first thing, and I want his address in the first place."

"You can get it from Mrs. Hartley, who is now staying with her father at Danhaye Park. I have kept up an occasional intercourse with her since I was introduced to her many years ago by our friend Montague Ashton, when I was at Seabay at the time of her marriage to your brother."

"I know," said Robert Hartley. "Was it not then, Hallet, that—do you think I forget?" and presently

added: "Have you late news of Ashton? Our correspondence has died of late, but not from indifference on either side, I am sure."

"Yes, I heard by the last mail. He is coming home for good next year."

"That is pleasant news for both of us," said Hartley.

"Well, I will write to Mrs. Hartley for her son-in-law's address, as soon as I get back to London."

"Now, Hartley, write at once, and stay here till the answer comes. There are your old loves the flowers, there are my children and my pigs, as inducements, to say nothing of the parson and his wife. My pigs are lovely creatures, and my wife and children are really not amiss. Come, I will lock up this misused document again till you want it, and I promise to urge you no more on that subject while you remain. How little I guessed what I had in my desk!"

"And you would never have known, if I had found the right person in the right place at the old house at home," said Robert.

CHAPTER X.

COLONEL DANHAYE CHEZ LUI.

IN the meantime, Mrs. Dowager Hartley had taken up her dutiful life beside her old father. That worldly, good-natured, well-bred, aged gentleman was delighted to get back "little Louy," his only child—the rebellious daughter he had cast off so easily long ago, when both were wrong, and neither owned it; when she needed him, and he could very comfortably do without her. Now she helped along the halting hours of his infirm age, and, what he secretly felt most, defended him against the charming tyranny, the oppressive devotion of his excellent sister. He still continued to regard that

model British gentlewoman with great awe, and to treat her with nervous politeness, hardly confessing to himself that she bored him dreadfully. On her part, that strong-minded lady had long ago, on the events that followed the elopement and marriage of Helen, courageously faced the probable failure of what had been the great hope of her life, ever since the elopement and marriage of Helen's mother. And now she faced as courageously the certainty of that failure, and gave up, without a hand-to-hand, ignoble, ungraceful, and useless struggle, the great stakes for which she had hitherto played. But there was a game worth playing still; her jointure was uncomfortably small (though far larger than her niece's), and if Danhaye Park and many thousands a year had slipped through her fingers, there were certain other accumulated thousands which, she felt, might and ought to come to the devoted sister rather than to the tardily dutiful child. But she welcomed her niece to Danhaye Park with her invariable unconquerable suavity, and the old amiable melancholy smile that she might have been smiling ever since she last pressed that same little black-weeded figure to her matronly bosom. Mrs. Louisa's arrival, however, was a surprise and a shock to this sweet-smiling lady that she bitterly felt. For the naughty old colonel had fairly outwitted her; evading her devoted attention to him and his correspondence by the help of an old servant, who had a regard for his master not altogether selfish, and who recollected the house when "little Miss Louy" was the generous fairy-queen of it.

"So you see," stammers the cowardly old warrior, in his first private and confidential gossip with his daughter, "you needn't say I invited you—your aunt might be hurt, as if I had asked you because *she* couldn't please me, with all her pains. And Letitia is a most excellent person, you know: I have the greatest respect for her—most kind and devoted, I'm sure—thorough good Christian, and all that. Wish *I* was," says the colonel solemnly. "Just a little heavy for a sick old fellow like me—only too good, in fact, for a frivolous old sinner,

that loves his newspaper and a chat. You see your aunt doesn't approve of my amusing myself—thinks I ought to consider my latter end, and listen to good books all day long: very nice, and proper, and appropriate, I'm sure; only, don't you see, there may be too much of a good thing. So I thought you'd come and cheer up the old papa. But suppose we let it seem all your own idea. Hey, Louy! Not to hurt your aunt's feelings."

But Mrs. Nettlefold was not so easily taken in as the venerable military tactician flattered himself. She was convinced, from the moment she saw Louisa received in her father's arms, that she would never have come to Danhaye Park without being sent for. The exemplary woman behaved admirably, as I have mentioned, and, indeed, as she always did.

Colonel Danhaye was not by any means so much shocked at the poverty of his daughter's second widowhood as he had been at that of her first. Not, I am afraid, that he was growing less worldly, even under the auspices of that thorough good Christian, his accomplished sister; but that he was getting rather more selfish, through old age and infirmity. He probably thought that Mrs. Hartley might not have been so ready to come and rock the cradle of his declining age, had she been as well jointured as she was still young-looking and pretty. I believe he did her injustice. He could not comprehend how the joys and sorrows of maternity had ennobled and chastened the spoilt little beauty, who had, besides, never been wanting in generous and affectionate impulses. He made a face of dismay at the story of the will, which had disinherited his grandson-in-law, and sunk his stately young grand-daughter among the "pinching and screwing folk," whose condition of life was so particularly contemptible and repulsive to him. But he was lenient even to their revolting poverty, and even told Louisa to invite the young folks to stay at Danhaye for a week; and she had better send them a five-pound note to pay their travelling expenses, &c. Louisa thanked him, and letting the subject drop, knew he

would speedily forget not only his invitation, but the objects of his intended bounty. She made up for it by perpetually thinking of her Helen, and often, often, in her closet, on her knees, cried and prayed for her girl; knowing much, and guessing more, in her fate that claimed the tears and strong prayers of a mother who could help her darling no other way.

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG COUPLE.

BUT in reality Helen was much less unhappy at this time than her mother fondly feared. She felt proud of her husband's courageous grapple with adversity, and of his talents, which of course she called genius: but the lump of sugar that really sweetened her cup was her secret consciousness that Edward was much too busy now for pleasant peccadilloes. She thought of him all the time he was away from her as she always had done, but no longer following him in that jealous clairvoyance which had made almost all her married life like a bad waking dream. She was of course left very much alone all day, and Edward, when he did come home, fagged and glum, from his work, was not very good company. He troubled himself very little about his wife. He worked hard for her as well as for himself, and, performing that portion of his duty to her, felt as self-satisfied as if he had performed the whole of it. And the silly wise young wife never doubted it either, but thought as much better of him than he deserved as he did himself.

Edward, who had been an amateur author ever since he was eighteen, found, as many another has done and will do, that play-work and worky-work are mighty different things. But still it took him hardly three days to settle to his labour, and to do it as if to the manner

born. He did not like it: he hated it, but he did it. That ill wind of adversity had certainly blown a strong, steady-burning flame of will and purpose out of his smouldering life of capricious pleasures. He had most of the real business and drudgery of the daily paper he had got the sub-editorship of, through the good offices of a literary friend. The nominal editor, the postcaptain of the ship, was accustomed to take his ease, and enjoy a very handsome allowance of leisure and liberty (as well as the postcaptain's pay), when he knew he could rely on his first lieutenant's doing nearly all the work of both in his own frequent absences on private affairs.

There is no such great injustice in this mode of proceeding, after all. The Name that is paid for is worth its price; and the grade in literature has not, in nine cases out of ten, been won in idleness. That leisure and liberty which the nominal chief takes, with the pay, have been fairly enough worked for and won—with the name and pay.

When Edward Hartley and his wife arrived in London from Hartley Hall, they went at first to a lodging he had had the precaution to engage: the same they had occupied during their honeymoon, nearly six years before. Helen, making no objection, would rather have gone anywhere else. Edward merely thought it lucky he knew of this temporary abode, less costly than an hotel, from whence to launch himself into his new element of labour. Even tender-hearted men very seldom suffer from those sentimental pangs which wrenched Helen's heart, as she compared past and present, in returning to this first bridal home of her hasty marriage. Only women, I believe, have this fine nervous network of association about them; and yet I have known two or three men whose feelings were more sensitive, delicate, and deep than those of any woman I ever met, or than perhaps any woman's ever were or could be.

However, as I said before, Helen was nearer being happy at this time than her mother dared to hope. She was at least almost contented even without her husband's

love, so that she could be pretty sure, as now, that he was caring more for no one else. Her heart might sometimes throb against his indifference, passionately complaining, like the nightingale's against a thorn; but even this state of things seemed a relief approaching to bliss, compared to the past; and there appeared, besides, a faint dawnlike hope in the darkness—or she could fancy it. Happily she did not guess how dead-cold was the capricious passion that she had accepted for love, and that she dreamt she might see reanimated. Why, even her remarkable beauty had so entirely ceased to be beautiful in his eyes, that he would have been unfeignedly surprised if he had heard anybody extol those endearing young charms! He had always entertained a poor opinion of her abilities. He did not think her a fool, but, what was to him far less pardonable and attractive in a woman, sentimentally intellectual. She struck him, even when he was most in love with her, as a rather clever girl, without the least originality; given to retailing any florid stuff out of any boshy book that pleased her low taste, offending his fine cultivated literary sensibilities by her admiration of the false and showy.

“Alas! he had never loved her enough to appreciate the just value of the jewel he stole! She was but a beautiful child when her beauty inspired his passion, and, naturally, her mother's range of ideas had, in some sort, bounded her young daughter's. While Edward saw very easily that Mrs. Hartley did not get much beyond a romantic school-girl in intellectual matters, he could recognise in her a noble and affectionate nature, *caractère*, a *morale* that won his respect and regard. But he had never perceived in Helen what far other gifts of soul than her mother's waited but a ray of sympathy to flower into expression—what a noble and sweet woman's heart in her made her ready to be sublime! Perhaps he had been too busy doing his best to break it.

Helen had a great comfort in her little lodging, in the helpful service of dear old Tatt. Edward did his wife no

injustice at all when, in self-defence, he permitted her to avail herself of this luxury, at her mother's anxious suggestion, and Tatt's own entreaty. He knew he could not trust their economical housekeeping to poor Helen. He had not allowed her the opportunity to acquire such useful knowledge. Since his marriage he had arranged all household matters by paying a trustworthy servant to manage them, with whom Helen had never dreamed of interfering. So that Edward did not oppose the motion so joyfully seconded by worthy Tatt herself, that she should initiate her young mistress in the grand female mystery of housekeeping under difficulties, in a little London lodging. Helen's good-natured French girl was well content to pass into the service of *Madame sa Mère*; the bewitching Miss Pippiny having embraced this unexpected juncture of affairs at the Family Seat, to announce, blushing, her approaching nuptials with the Scotch gardener.

CHAPTER XII.

UNCLE ROBERT.

HELEN immediately began to take lessons in domestic economy. She went forth to the tradesfolk, with Tatt and a little red account-book, every morning, directly after breakfast, and after Edward's departure to the office. Not liking her share of work a bit better than he did, she buckled to it with equal resolution, and perhaps more heroism.

One day, when she and Tatt came home, about eleven o'clock, the Irish maid of the house, who opened the street-door, yelled after her:

"There's a jontleman in the drawnroom forr ye!"

Helen, with her foot on the stair, stops, wondering who it can possibly be, much as we all pause over the

outside of a letter, guessing at what a finger touch will tell us. But in this instance the turning of the door-handle does not finish her wondering, until the tall thin-faced man who comes forward says, somewhat shyly, but with a good smile:

"You don't know me; how should you? I am Robert Hartley, your Uncle Montague's friend."

It is a curious instinct that thus makes him claim a cordial greeting from the lovely, somewhat stately young lady, his nephew's wife, rather as her uncle's friend than her father-in-law's brother.

"Oh," cries Helen, holding out both her hands, with beautiful brightening cheeks, and sweet cordially-smiling large brown eyes, "Uncle Robert! I am so very glad to see you!" adding, "You are Edward's Uncle Robert, so I hope I may call you mine."

To which the tall, sad-looking gentleman replies by stooping with her hands in his, and kissing her fair forehead, as I believe she was expecting and meaning him to do.

They sat down and had a great deal of explanatory conversation: Uncle Robert's poor dim eyes peering at his newly instituted niece with a deal of tender admiration and fatherliness springing in his heart, such as the barren soil of his late brother Grinston had never produced in the whole course of his step-paternal existence.

Helen's young spirits rose at the affectionate tone and looks (she hardly knew herself how she had been hungering after such for many a day); and she could presently prattle to this elderly stranger almost as freely as she used with her mother, as she had *never* dared with her husband. She had soon heard of Captain Hartley's visit to Hartley Hall, and laughed at the Nettlefold-Hartley mystification; and of the visit to Toxford parsonage, and how Uncle Robert got their address from mamma, and how he came up to town directly, travelling through the night, on purpose to see them; also had shared his pleasure in anticipating Uncle Montague's return, &c., &c. She told him again how glad she was, and how glad

Edward would be to see him ! And was he going to see mamma, as she and grandpapa wished ?—how glad mamma would be ! She heard twice a week from mamma ! Sometimes she wrote to mamma oftener than that. Grandpapa was very kind to mamma, and wanted her to stay at Danhaye always. She thought darling old mamma was pretty happy in her old home again. She had not been there for nearly twenty-five years ! Only think !

“I have not seen your mother for fifteen years,” observes Uncle Robert, thoughtfully ; “she was very pretty.”

“She is not in the least altered,” asserts Helen, hardily ; “she is the most beautiful little woman you ever saw, still ! I hope you will go and see her, and then you will say the same yourself.”

“And have you and Edward been staying at Danhaye Park ?”

“Not yet. Edward is too busy. He has no time for anything pleasant now. He works very hard, Uncle Robert. He is the real editor of the *World's Diary*, though he has none of the credit. I feel sure the *World's Diary* could not go on a week without him ; it is entirely on his shoulders. Some day Edward's genius will be acknowledged and appreciated, but, like most men of genius, he is underpaid and overworked, Uncle Robert,” says Helen, in her pretty childish sententious way that Edward is so severe on.

“So poor Edward has worked very hard ?” says Captain Hartley.

“Yes, too hard for his health, I fear : not that it has suffered yet, and he never complains. But he has not been used to such a sedentary life, you know, and I fear it is great drudgery.”

“He has had you to work for, and I think,” says Uncle Robert, “it may have been very pleasant to work for you, my dear. But how have *you* managed ? I am afraid you have suffered many discomforts to which you were not accustomed, in this dull little London lodging.”

"Oh no!" rejoins Helen, not at all affronted at this disparagement of her apartment; "I like it; I am quite comfortable. The paper is rather dingy, and the carpet is dreadfully ugly; but they are going to give us a more comfortable sofa for Edward, who comes home very tired; and when we have a good big fire blazing in the autumn evenings, I think it will look quite cozy. We were in another lodging at first, in a street out of Piccadilly, but it was a great deal too much a week, so Tatt found us this. I like it so much, Uncle Robert."

He sees the sweet unselfish content in her lovely loving young face, and feels very much inclined to kiss her again.

Uncle Robert did not stir from Helen's little lodging all day. He asked her if he should be in her way, and she answered him, to his satisfaction, by returning that affectionate kiss he had given her on his arrival. Tatt, nobly protesting against the excesses of fashion, in her afternoon black silk, short and skimpy, brought in the luncheon-tray of biscuits and fruit, and was cut off in the midst of the unsophisticated Sunday-school curtsy of her youth, by finding her honest red fingers seized and kindly pressed, while Captain Hartley asked her if she had quite forgotten him and Myrtle Cottage.

Uncle Robert and Helen were still enjoying each other's company with undiminished zest, when Edward appeared.

He was not too tired to be in a good humour, was very civil to his uncle, and appeared to the utmost advantage.

The trio had a pleasant little dinner, and a Parisian cup of coffee afterwards, that did honour to the true culinary genius of Tatt, who had stooped to conquer, even to the point of taking a lesson from Mademoiselle Sophie—"that there tippitty Frenchy," as she called her—with becoming national superciliousness.

Captain Hartley, finding himself alone with Edward shortly after dinner, fell silent, became absent, and uncomfortably conscious that he was come to see his

nephew on very particular business. He tried once or twice to overcome his shyness, but, looking up, the young man's handsome, rather sarcastic countenance quite awed the simple gentleman. So that he at last broke, unexpectedly and impolitely, into a pleasant little story Edward was telling, and stammered nervously :

"Where's Helen ? I—I beg your pardon, Edward, but I have something—in fact, I came on purpose—in short, would you kindly call your wife ? I think I would rather she was present."

Much mystified, Edward easily complied with his uncle's wish, by raising his voice and calling Helen by name, on the probable chance of her being in the adjoining room, from whence she indeed instantly emerged through the folding doors.

Then Uncle Robert saw the time was come, and, like many shy people driven into courage, took his purpose in his two hands, and had made an end of the matter in half an hour.

He said : "Just sit down, will you, my dear. I want you and Edward to listen to something."

Then he told them, in his way, what I had, perhaps, better relate to you in mine, for he was obliged to tell them much of his early life, that they had only a vague notion of, but that you know already.

His father had been an affectionate, amiably disposed man—such a one as you may call, if you like, a good sort of person, and as I am inclined to consider a very poor creature. A quasi-invalid half his life, he seemed to think himself exempted from the least display of moral courage ; and though too fond of his youngest son to join in the maternal condemnation, was a great deal fonder of his own repose. He would never risk the serious domestic consequences of openly opposing his awful wife, by taking the part of her favourite victim. Thus, the unnatural mother chose to crush her youngest son ; and the father, whom I must consider unnatural too, permitted her to do so. He allowed her and her pet Grinston, the son after her own heart, to make

Robert's home a hell to him, and to exasperate his ardent and sensitive temper to madness. He let the lad cast himself on the world, solitary, reckless, half broken-hearted, his moral health shattered, haunted by that remorseful horror of himself which darkened hope, and turned his vivid childlike faith into a deadly superstition.

But it seemed to the good sort of man his father, that Robert's permanent absence was his own likeliest chance of permanent domestic peace, which he appears to have valued a good deal beyond justice and duty to his poor son.

Nor did his conscience interfere much with his comfort, while he was manifesting his fatherly sympathy by affectionate letters, and great liberality in money matters. In his last illness, however, when his wife may have looked less awful than the guilt of her unmotherliness, and his own share in it, he lay and thought continually of his sailor son. Probably, in that terrible retribution of death-bed remorse, he magnified rather than palliated the crime of his own weakness; and so at last came to take an extreme resolution. At last he would protect his youngest son against the vindictive cruelty and injustice that had long ago shut the doors of home on the love-hungering lad.

Just at that time a lawyer happened to come to the Hall on some matter of business in which Mr. Hartley was concerned. Not the Seabay solicitor, but a stranger, who had been sent down by a company in London, who required Mr. Hartley's signature to a certain document.

It seems that Robert Hartley was denied access to his father's death-bed; but on the summer night he expired, the son, lying on the grass under a great oak in the park, watching the light in his father's windows, was found and touched on the shoulder by the lawyer above mentioned. This worthy man had been waiting at the "Hartley Arms" for the first tidings of the squire's death, to fulfil a mission he had undertaken three days before. He led the poor

young man very kindly to the little inn, and when he saw him calmer, gave him a sealed packet.

"From your father," said he. "I promised him to place it in your own hand as soon as I knew he was dead. The document is properly witnessed and strictly legal : I can answer for it."

The first and only thing Robert saw, on breaking the seals, was a bit of paper scrawled over crookedly by a dying hand, but in characters more beautiful and precious in his loving eyes than letters of gold.

"Here it is," said Captain Hartley, with a very trembling voice and fingers, taking the yellow scrap from the case of his old silver hunting-watch (his father's gift on some birthday of boyhood), unfolding its worn creases tenderly, and laying it before Helen.

"Forgive me, my son Robert. I have not been a good father to you. Nothing I can do now can mend that. These are the last words I shall ever write. God bless you, my dear son Robert !

"CHARLES HARTLEY."

When Captain Hartley had reverently replaced the precious morsel in the case of his watch, and quietly wiped his eyes, he added : "This was in the packet too : " and "this " he placed before his nephew. It was a will, by which Edward's grandfather left the family estate to his youngest son, declaring, briefly enough, that his conscience impelled him to this "act of atonement for much injustice." That as his elder son would assuredly inherit from his mother her own estates, over which she retained full power, he could not justly complain that his brother's future was protected by their father in a like manner.

Such was the document which, cowardly to the last, Mr. Hartley had employed a stranger to draw up furtively, knowing how difficult it would be to insure secrecy and avoid the domestic storm which would burst even over his dying head, were he to dictate such a will to the

family solicitor, who was also his wife's, and entirely in her interests.

Circumstances favoured poor Robert's instant determination never to act on this will, which he only forbore to destroy from respect and gratitude to his father, and as a sacred death-bed testimony of his father's affection. The London attorney went to South America on the same business that took him to Hartley Hall, and died there six months after. Robert humbled himself in vain to his mother and Grinston, craving only forgiveness from the one, and brotherly good-will from the other; and, often repulsed in cold blood, was, as we know, often betrayed into bursts of bitter and passionate indignation. But never had he felt even a moment's temptation to crush them with the deadly weapon he possessed. That little-dreamed-of document lay harmless, resealed, in his desk, for many years, till, when he last went to sea, he consigned it to the care of Mr. Hallet, with whom he had been on very friendly terms since the painful period of Ellen Datchet's death. He indorsed the packet with an injunction that it was to be destroyed, unopened, in case of his death.

In the meanwhile, his father's will, duly drawn up some years previous to his death by the family solicitor, was produced and acted on. In this will, leaving the paternal estate to Grinston, the youngest son was affectionately mentioned, and recommended to the care and kindness of "my excellent and dearly beloved wife and eldest son." His excellent widow and his heir came to the conclusion that, large sums having been lavished on the prodigal, and squandered by him during the years that had elapsed since the will was made, they might consider the testator's intentions to have been amply carried out by himself, and nothing further could be expected from the estate.

"Very right and fair, my dear sir," smirked the family solicitor. "Mr. Robert must see that he has eaten his pudding, and can't have it too."

Mr. Robert, as you know, acquiesced but too readily in this view of the matter.

Not until he discovered, on his return to England, the extraordinary and totally unexpected turn matters had taken at the Family Seat, had he ever cast a thought on the possibility of interfering with the powers that were.

But while Mr. Drewe was favouring him with the particulars of that astounding change of dynasty, the reverend gentleman little guessed that it was already overthrown by that meek and dusty naval officer, over against whom he sat, in his own glossy black picked out with snowy white, full of Hartley meat and wine. Sitting over against him in his father's place!—that was the one thing that occurred to Robert Hartley, lifting up his eyes in a pause of the pompous droning, and that roused him to push back his chair and be off with scant leavetaking! The one thing—besides, indeed, the absolute necessity for at last producing the long-suppressed will: a necessity that he had instinctively recognised, and that had occupied his whole mind since he knew the simple facts concerning which Mr. Drewe was perorating unheeded.

When all was told, Edward first broke silence.

“Then, Uncle Robert, you will now, I hope, assert and assume your rights.”

“I!” said Captain Hartley, in an accent of painful astonishment. “Surely I have made myself understood. Helen, my dear, don't *you* understand?”

“Not exactly, dear Uncle Robert,” said she, answering his wistful look by putting her hand tenderly and almost reverently on his, her eyes wet with the pitiful and indignant tears she had shed for him.

He took her hand and squeezed it fondly, while he turned to his nephew, and said in a firmer voice:

“Edward, you are the only son of my elder brother, and the rightful master of the old place.”

Then, faltering and eager, his thin face reddening, his whole bearing that of profound humility:

"Mind, I am not presuming to *give*, but I may thank God who has made me the instrument of this just restitution. I see now," he added, with a sweet smile—"I can see now why my dear father was permitted to make that will—to be led away by his fondness for me, even into an injustice. It never hurt anybody, and this was to be the end. And, Edward, we mustn't judge your father: he was irritated, he was so used to dictate, and never could bear to be opposed. Let us believe he regretted his will, and would have altered it but for the suddenness of his death. You see it has been for a very little while, and you have both borne adversity gallantly—you won't be the worse, and, so—God bless you, dear children!—I'll go now."

He got up and made some steps to the door, but Edward, standing up too, stopped him by saying, in a very distinct, quiet voice:

"Stay, Uncle Robert. You are extremely kind, but you must let me have a voice in this matter. I quite understand now; I am very much obliged to you for intending to give me your estate, which, it seems, was never my father's to give or withhold from me, but I decline to accept it."

"You decline!"

Poor Uncle Robert came back, and sat down silent with dismay. It had never entered his head that Edward would refuse to concur in a proceeding which seemed to himself so simply right and just.

"But, Helen, speak to him. Edward! think of your wife."

"Oh! my dear Uncle Robert," cried Helen, putting her arms round his neck, and kissing his grey hair, "I do think my husband is right. I knew he would say that. Only do believe, dear—do believe in all our love and gratitude."

"*Gratitude!*" murmured Uncle Robert, almost putting away her hand; "you, too, child—you, too!—and after I have told you all!"

He sat as if bewildered, then put his hand before his

face, and tears of very bitter disappointment trickled through his fingers.

Edward went to the window and stood there ; but Helen stayed beside Uncle Robert, and kept her hand round his neck, silently tender.

When he was calm again, he wiped his eyes, and, looking very much ashamed, said he would leave them. Helen softly begged him to stay awhile.

"We won't say anything more about *that*, you know, to-night. To-morrow we can talk it over quite calmly and reasonably, and Edward will show you why he can't do as you wish. But do stay now, dear Uncle Robert ; and I want to show you Edward's Italian sketches, you know."

"My child, I can't see them, I'm afraid ; my eyes are feeling worse since I made an old baby of myself just now."

"*Worse !* what is the matter with them, uncle ? "

"I am going blind, Helen."

PART IV.



CHAPTER I.

ABROAD AND AT HOME.

Six months after. An apartment *au premier* in Blancheville, and John Drewe writing fiercely in his bare little study, with the big black Tomb of a stove in it. When you come upon him here in summer with the dingy blind down, he has somewhat the air of a misanthrope, who has taken up his abode in a mausoleum. It is winter now, and the mausoleum is an oven.

Ah, the horrible ugly depth of Blancheville winter! For weeks the frozen city has been lying dead and black under the snow, like a livid corpse half-hidden under an old torn sheet.

Blancheville cold is of a surly ill-conditioned sort, that there's no shaking hands with cheerily. Outside, the dead city under its soiled and ragged snow-shroud; within doors, nothing to warm you! The stoves choke and bake you, but the heat you get is only skin-deep, and your heart is sick with cold all the time—you feel possessed of a devil of cold, that will never be exorcised but by some priestly ray of God's sunshine, late next spring. That is, if you survive this winter, which you are probably in a state of mind neither to expect nor wish.

A knock at John Drewe's door, a very little way up it.

"Qui est là ?"

"C'est moi," replies a tiny treble.

"Qu'est-ce que c'est ? Mais entre donc," says John, in rather a big voice, considering it answers such a very little one.

Enter small Johnny, comfortered up to his small nose, great-coated, and capped, and frostily rosy from his trot in the snow.

"Papa, c'est ce monsieur."

"Qui donc ?"

"Papa, je ne sais pas dire le nom : c'est ce monsieur qui—Ah, tiens ! he who com to star at maman."

"Comment ! petit drôle !" roars John.

Little Johnny, trembling with fright, whispers :

"Papa, tu as dit cela."

"Va-t'en !" growls John.

"What's the matter ?" says Edward Hartley, who has just reached the threshold of Drewe's apartment.

He has heard nothing distinctly, thanks to the noise his own boots have made, as they clattered up the comfortless, carpetless, gamboge-coloured stairs dear to Blancheville householders.

Johnny *s'esquive*.

"Well," says Edward, "I am come to tell you how I get on. I've got the professorship—the ushership-on-stilts."

"Oh !" says John, looking very little interested.

"Yes," continues his visitor, deliberately pulling off his gloves, and then his over-coat. "It must do till I can do without it."

"Oh !" repeats his host, beginning to write. "I'm afraid I can't give you my attention just now, Hartley. I am working against time, as usual."

"Never mind," says Edward, accommodatigly ; "I'll go and talk to your wife about it, and she can tell you afterwards, if you like."

John's massive blond face, already flushed by heat and annoyance, gets alarmingly scarlet ; but he writes on, and only says :

"Have you told your own wife yet?"

"No," returns Edward, smiling pleasantly; "I shall give yours the preference. I know madame is *chez elle*. I followed master Johnny and the *bonne* home just now. What were you bullying my little friend about? The frightful atmosphere of this room is ruining your sweet temper, *mon cher*. *Sans adieu*."

He goes out of the room with a twinkle of amusement in his eye, and a sneer at the corners of his mouth. John Drewe's face has nothing gentle in its expression, as he holds it up and listens till he hears Edward rap at the sitting-room door, on the other side of the landing, hears him say, "It's me," and go in. Then he bangs down his big fist on the table, with a hasty word, which I leave to the mercy of the recording angel.

Edward Hartley and his wife have been in Blancheville about three weeks. He got heartily sick of his sub-editorship in London, but it is due to Edward to say, that the *World's Diary* gave him up, and not he the *World's Diary*. That is, the daily paper in question stopped payment; the illustrious nominal editor fell on his legs into another nominal editorship; and the real one found himself thrown out of employment, and still too obscure to command a fair day's wages for a fair day's work. Steadily, or obstinately, or we will say pushing a right principle perhaps past right, he refused the ample provision urged on him in two quarters. He would not permit his wife to accept any longer the allowance pressed on her, as on an adopted daughter, by her Uncle Montague; nor would he himself take a shilling from Uncle Robert, who dunned him with imploring letters, and was likened by him to an importunate creditor upside down.

For this wretched Dives *malgré lui* was now, to his despair, enthroned at the Family Seat, a very legitimate and rightful monarch. Mr. Hallet, to whom he had betaken himself in his misery, on Edward's rejection of his proposal, laboriously proved to him that, being unable to force his estate on his nephew during his own

life, the only way left ultimately to repair the unjust will of the late Grinston, was to establish that of the late Grinston's father, which nullified it. Robert Hartley, utterly cast down and unhappy, resigned the whole affair into the hands of his reverend friend, whose proceedings shortly resulted in a nine-days' wonder, and the bloodless eviction of the usurping powers. There was no law-fight; the Drewe-Nettlefolds retired placably enough; and being easy-tempered and far from unreasonable, reconciled themselves philosophically to the loss of about one-third of their joint fortunes.

The Reverend Peter Drewe was a person most seriously affected by the family *bouleversement*. That sleek gentleman having reached the top of the tree up which he had been creeping for a considerable portion of his life, suddenly found himself in a very confused and contused state lying at the bottom of it. The living of Hartleybridge had been bestowed on him by the late Grinston, very soon after the accession of that potentate, when the then vicar had been promoted to a deanery. Up to that time Peter had filled the humbler office of curate in the family parish, as well as of tame clergyman at the Family Seat, and continued to combine the duties attached to the latter position with the more dignified rôle of vicar.

Now that the late Grinston was proved never to have been the patron of the family living, where was the reverend and respectable Peter, who had taken and held that which had never been Grinston's to give? He was lying, as I said, at the foot of his Tree, in a very stunned and helpless condition after his tumble. But presently the reverend gentleman sat up, rubbed his head, found no bones broken, and gradually revived.

Had not his flaxen-headed daughter-in-law church-patronage still? Yea, verily. The Rectory of Coniscombe had been in the gift of her grandmother, the sister of that exemplary lady who had left all her handsome fortune to her dutiful son, Grinston. Stiff little Mrs.

Drewe-Nettlefold was still, if not trebly, doubly an heiress, representing and uniting in herself the property and privileges that had been divided so many years ago between the co-heiresses of Sir Coney Grinston. No bones broken! and balm in Gilead even for his bruises! For Peter perfectly well remembered the formal lamentations of his daughter-in-law over the invalided rector of Coniscombe, who was now in Italy, and in the last stage of consumption.

Why, there was but a dead leaf in Peter's path, and the besom already extended to sweep it away!

He felt quite sure of his flaxen-headed daughter-in-law, so submissively respectful, so formally dutiful.

As for his big son—"William's an ass, Willam's nobody," was the sole commentary with which his attached father dismissed him from his calculation of *pros* and *cons*. He made up his mind with the promptitude which the emergency required, an emergency with which he conceived his master intellect had triumphantly coped. He felt that his occupation was o'er of the family living, now that it belonged to the family pariah, on whom, in his capacity of clerical lackey at the Family Seat, he had ostentatiously and solemnly helped to shut the family doors!

Moreover, if that poor-spirited creature, Robert Hartley, were to confirm the presentation of his brother, which was very likely, Robert's health was precarious, and Robert's heir was avowedly his nephew Edward, who would not, Peter was perfectly sure, forget and forgive old debts in the same preposterously Christian spirit, and make the family living a bed of roses to Peter.

So he pompously announced to his son and daughter that he should resign the living of Hartleybridge. "Not waiting to be at the mercy, or choosing to accept the possible favours of One who had long since Justly Forfeited not only his (Peter's) esteem, but the natural affection of Those whose memories he (Peter) was bound to consider Sacred." He became quite excited by admiration of his own magnanimity and magniloquence, and

mouthed out capitals as big as those on Mr. Gye's placards. He had "a Little Something, saved through years of a frugal and self-denying existence; it would meet his modest wants till he could find a Cure, and Umbly in his old age recommence his spiritual labours in some Strange Vineyard. Meantime, he would ask his dear daughter-in-law to give his grey head shelter for a few weeks beneath her roof, and permit him a period of Rest and Preparation at Coneyscourt, when she and his good William went thither from Hartley Hall."

Stiff little Mrs. Drewe-Nettlefold replied politely, but without enthusiasm, that of course it would give herself and her husband much pleasure to receive Mr. Drewe whenever it suited him to visit them.

And in a very short time thereafter the Reverend Peter, comfortably installed at Coneyscourt, was prowling about the parish, making himself thoroughly acquainted betimes with the strange vineyard in which he intended to grow his port wine in future.

Meanwhile, Edward Hartley was self-cast on his own resources, and protested worthily and bravely that a well-educated man, in the vigour of health and intellect, should be able to maintain his wife and himself; and was certainly bound to try; especially if he had neither present means, nor future certainty by birthright. You see the only estate his father really had had to leave, was legally enough left to his flaxen-headed cousin once removed.

"Time enough when I have failed, when I fall sick—time enough then to give in and own I am beaten. When my wife is starving with me, she shall leave me, of course; and when I die, they can take care of her. As for counting on dead men's shoes, I did it too long, and will never do it more."

Good and gallant words! as ought to have been the heart of the young man who spoke them.

Edward determined to emigrate to Blancheville, where living was cheaper, and where he found he might secure a vacant mathematical "professorship" in a college, *i. e.*

school. At the same time he found that he could earn money, as John Drewe did, by contributing to English foreign periodicals.

He could write with equal ease in three of the modern languages, and his partly foreign education fitted him particularly for the sort of employment he meditated. He speedily put his plan into execution; he had no means that could stand delay, and only permitted Helen a day at Danhaye to part from her mother and her faithful Tatt.

This good soul was obliged to content herself with passing once more into the service of her elder mistress (*vice* Mademoiselle Sophie, promoted to a neighbouring countess).

Edward justly enough perceived that poor Tatt would be a very useless appendage in "foreign parts," and an expensive sentimental indulgence that he could not afford his wife. They must hire a sturdy *bonne*, and he must trust to the tough mercies of *Blancheville* restaurateurs.

Helen acquiesced in everything, and hid from him what tears she shed. She left England hopeful and contented still. But not a month had passed, and hope and content had once more passed out of her life.

You will very soon know why.

Idleness seems to have been the root of all the evil in poor Helen's lot; and having no regular occupation for the first week after their arrival at *Blancheville*, Mr. Hartley recurred to his old pastime, and began to make love to his neighbour's wife. The Drewes and the Hartleys occupied apartments in the same "Place;" a melancholy semicircle of tall haggard houses, having a lonely black statue of somebody, standing apparently on three pyramidal stoves, one atop of another, surrounded by a high iron fender, in the midst of the desolate stony waste before them.

The two English families naturally at first clattered a good deal up and down each other's gamboge-coloured stairs. The women did not suit particularly; but Helen, with her unconscious *air noble*, was sweet, and gracious,

and chatty; and simple Susan Drewe sat and looked lovely, and smiled demurely, and very much enjoyed discussing the cut of a collar or a sleeve, taking, like all the serious ladies I ever knew, an extra-feminine interest in such pretty vanities; also, secretly doting on shopping, she was ready on the least pretext to accompany Mrs. Hartley, and point out to her the best shops in the most crowded streets of Blancheville.

Helen admired Susan's sweet, rather namby-pamby beauty prodigiously, and presently began to please her own artistic fancy by draping the lovely creature after certain famous old pictures of Saints and Madonnas familiar to her in foreign galleries.

They were but girls still, these pretty matrons, and must not be thought too frivolous; but I will own that simple Susan was a very womanish woman indeed, for all that celestial look of hers. And one night, the two ladies being in Mrs. Drewe's bedroom, assisting at Johnny's *coucher*, Helen made a wonderful Madonna della Seggiola of Susan, with little Johnny in his little night-shirt on her knees. Simple Susan performed in this *tableau vivant* with her usual aptitude, and for all the world as if she had been a theatrical apprentice to a lady of fashion; and she let Helen call both their husbands to the door, and sat there to be shown off with a deal of modest composure and sweet self-complacency.

But suddenly poor Helen perceived that one of their husbands, and the wrong one, admired the *tableau vivant* she had got up so cleverly, a good deal more than she had intended, or than was expedient.

And, ah! how many a time afterwards poor Helen, being left all alone, paced her solitary room laughing herself to scorn with streaming eyes, and passionately called herself "Fool—fool—fool!" remembering how nicely she had dressed up that doll!

But Edward began by rhapsodizing about John Drewe's wife to John himself, with all his accustomed graceful *bonhomie*, carelessness of other people's feelings, and total want of moral sense in such matters.

He used to entertain Jack after dinner with encomiums on Jack's wife's beauty, and how refreshing he found her pretty Puritan reserve, after the manners of the foreign women he had been mostly used to.

"I declare I think Methodism an excellent school for a woman to go through," he would say. "It gives them a sort of demure air, that is so very pretty. They seem taught to look down, and to raise their eyes timidly, and all kinds of little bewitchingness. Then their plain, severe way of dressing themselves is a hundred times more taking than rose-coloured ribbons, and artificial flowers, and assurance. Though most likely there's very little difference, except superficially. Of course, I don't mean to apply these remarks to Mrs. Drewe."

"So much the better!" growls John; "and I think the tone of your conversation perfectly disgusting."

"Bless us!" says Edward, looking the picture of guileless astonishment. "What next?"

CHAPTER II.

SIMPLE SUSAN.

WHEN Mr. Hartley said, "It's me," and walked into Mrs. Drewe's sitting-room that morning, about three weeks after his arrival at Blancheville, he did so with the air of an *habitué*.

The room was rather larger than John's cabinet, but still out of all proportion with the twin monster of a stove that always over or under heated it. The furniture was in the usual evil taste of cheap lodging-house furniture everywhere, with the aggravations peculiar to Blancheville. Simple Susan was needleworking, high-seated on a horrible sofa, constructed apparently of solid slabs of stone, disguised in a maddening slippery horse-

hair cover of an unpleasant brown, dyed, I should think, in Blancheville beer. But the fair and blooming person perched on this bad eminence could make a sunshine even in so shady a place as a cheap Blancheville lodging.

She coloured softly when she saw Edward Hartley, and cast down her lovely blue eyes after one shy glance, but suffered him to retain her hand a good deal longer than polite cordiality required. And then her hands trembled, as she tried to fold up her work to give herself a countenance; and so did her voice, as she asked how Mrs. Hartley was—in the same intention. She had all the air of a timid girl expecting, and not at all disliking, to be made love to, and looked just as perfectly modest as well as innocently conscious. This bashful embarrassment was probably her chief charm to Edward Hartley, though it was little else than the flutter of vanity, in a weak woman without social knowledge or social self-possession. And this he perfectly well knew, accepting this pretty agitation for what it was worth—as a very graceful phase of her soft beauty. He sat and looked at her for a minute with much satisfaction, and then said :

“I’ve got the professorship, Madonna.”

“Oh,” said she, confusedly, “the professorship—yes. I hope—I suppose it’s a good thing.”

“My holiday’s over, Madonna; no more pleasant play-time for us. Are you sorry?”

“But—but you must be glad to get it. And what does your wife say?”

“Are you a little sorry, Madonna?” persisted Edward, taking out of her hands the work she was now unfolding—for the same reason that she had folded it five minutes before.

“But you must be pleased,” said she, keeping up the feeble pretence of not understanding him, yet letting him hold her hand; “and I’m sure your wife will be delighted.”

“What has that to do with it!” said Edward, with a laugh, letting go her hand, and pushing his chair back.

"As if you cared for my wife!—as if you two women didn't hate each other—naturally!"

"I am sure I don't hate Mrs. Hartley," rejoined Susan, sanctimoniously. "I don't hate any one, I hope; and I am sorry for those who can harbour such wicked feelings."

"Well, then, she hates you, and you pity and despise her, *ma douce amie*," rejoined Edward, with an impatient sarcasm she could not appreciate.

"Mrs. Hartley certainly has been very rude to me of late," said Susan; "so pointedly avoiding me, and, when we do meet, looking at me as if she hardly knew me—so polite and so grand. The pitying and despising is all on that side, I might say."

"Well, I suppose you would not like it, if you were to see that Jack admired her as much as I do you."

"I shouldn't care," said simple Susan, in a very metallic, distinct voice, and with eyes all of a sudden cold and hard as turquoise stones. "I shouldn't care in the least. He is quite welcome to go his way, if he would just let me go mine."

If Edward had really loved this woman, he would have detested her at that moment; but as it was, the sole effect of her frank little outburst was to disturb his pleasure in her loveliness. He actually made a grimace of annoyance, as at a discord in a soft harmony, put up his hand to shut out her marred face, and said, "Oh, don't, Madonna!"

He did not trouble himself to explain either gesture or ejaculation, however; and, coming back to her side, began to talk of more interesting matters.

Small Johnny came in and interrupted them, standing a moment by his mother, with his timid but remarkably quick blue eyes going from her to "*ce monsieur*."

"What do you want?" said Susan to him sharply, in French; "where is Pauline?"

"She is gone to the shoemaker's for my shoes," said Johnny; "and papa met me on the stairs, and told me to come and ask you for a picture-book."

"Papa's spy!" said Mrs. Drewe scornfully, in English, glancing at Edward. "You are treading on my gown, sir," she added, in French, pushing her little boy away; "*va-t'en!*"

"He does not know English enough to understand, if we talk fast," said she, in reply to Edward's gesture of warning.

Poor little Johnny! It was quite true. He knew less of his mother-tongue now, than he had done eight or ten months before. He had so very little to do with either of his parents. John Drewe was not without fatherly affection, but he could not savour the sweetness of it, through the nauseous and bitter taste of his disappointed life. His manner was rough, and Johnny was afraid of him. As for his mother, whom the child had passionately loved, she had always been devoid of that strong maternal instinct without which the fairest woman is, methinks, but a moral monster, crippled, squalid, and ugly as sin. Little Johnny was lucky in his *bonne*, a great, good-natured, solid, loud-laughing Flemish girl, who lacked not that crown of all womanly instincts, and was very fond of *le petit*. She generally made time to play with him even while she tramped about her housework; and when she clattered to church or market in her big sabots, *le petit* was always to be seen trotting and gossiping at her ample skirts.

All their talk was in French (the French of Blancheville), and so it came to pass that the child's father and mother found it easiest to say the little they had to say to him in that tongue. Alas! the little began to be comprised in that impatient "*va-t'en!*" and as for Johnny's English, it would have utterly disappeared from a less retentive memory than his.

Edward Hartley was rather fond of children when they were pretty—as I have said before, somewhere; and Mrs. Drewe's untender impatience with her little son, and lack of motherliness generally, often shocked him.

This was one of the false notes that screeched at him,

as it were, setting his teeth on edge, now and then, in the midst of the musical sweetness of her beauty.

He now spoke good-naturedly enough to little Johnny, and said, in French, holding out his hand :

"Surely you know me by this time, my friend. Come, what is my name?"

"I don't know exactly, monsieur; but I know you are the monsieur who comes to *star* at maman."

"Comment! petit méchant," cried Mrs. Drewe, astounded.

"Mais oui, maman," persisted small Johnny, frightened but pertinacious. "Papa said it so plain."

"Papa?" cried Mrs. Drewe, aghast.

"Si, maman," said Johnny, with modest firmness.

"What did he say?" asked Edward Hartley, immensely tickled, and very little disturbed by this revelation.

"Papa stood at the window: he knew me not there behind. I sought my ball below the table. Papa said, '*Here he com to star at my wife.*' Then you arrived, monsieur."

Wee Johnny had repeated the English portion of this with conscientious and painstaking precision, and Edward Hartley fell back in his chair shouting with laughter; in the midst of which paroxysm Johnny, who stood gravely watching him, heard the voice of his dear gossip, Pauline, on the stairs, and ran away to her.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Mrs. Drewe, rather sullenly, at last. She thought Edward ought to have treated the matter more sentimentally, and soothed her soft alarms.



CHAPTER III.

"MY COUSIN."

Two months after that, Edward Hartley was steadily enough at work, and found he could, with less drudgery

than in London, earn enough to live on, yet (unfortunately) keep a corner of time for "necessary relaxation."

And one Sunday Edward went to John Drewe's apartment in a furious ill-humour. He rushed upstairs, pushed open the sitting-room door—and knocked afterwards. Mrs. Susan had a visitor: a personage who was sitting as close to her as Mr. Hartley was permitted, or permitted himself, to sit, and who, Mr. Hartley could have sworn, was holding her hand when he burst in on them.

"Oh!" said he, "I see you are engaged, Mrs. Drewe. That accounts for it."

He did not say what was accounted for, but sat down in the middle of the room, and eyed the offending pair savagely.

It was the fat-faced pink-and-white young man whom he had found last May in the hop arbour, at Maison Dulac, reading a tract through his nose to Mrs. Drewe.

Susan looked scared and pale, and introduced Mr. Hartley and "my cousin, Mr. William Pidgely," with very much trepidation of manner.

The fat-faced young man smiled radiantly at Edward, and observed that he remembered the good gentleman's face.

"An old friend of John Drewe's, I think, dear cousin?"

"Yes," Mrs. Drewe said hastily. "Mr. Hartley and my husband were boys together."

"Ah," Mr. Pidgely sighed, looking at John Drewe's old friend with a tender benignity full of solicitude. "And his dear soul, cousin?" said he, in an unctuous whisper, shaded by his fat hand. "How about his dear soul?"

Mrs. Drewe hurriedly murmured something, colouring deeply, and stole a terrified glance at Mr. Hartley, whose patience under this provocation she dared not count on. She was relieved by the sullen gravity of his aspect, and his solemn silence, though that might be ominous; and she hastened to effect a diversion by pressing some luncheon on her other visitor. That personage promptly

accepted her offer, saying meekly, in an exhausted manner, that anything would do—*anything*.

“A morsel, dear cousin, and a little—just a *little* Cognac—just a leetle, dear cousin,” murmured Mr. Pidgely, in a faint vague voice, and smiling with his eyes shut, as if he were asleep and beatifically dreaming of brandy and water.

Edward did not go even then, but sat eyeing poor Mr. Pidgely in an embarrassing manner; while that pious young man ate, and drank, and sweetly gossiped the while about saving grace, gosple trewth, and Glawry. But at last the table was cleared, and then Mr. Pidgely, clearing his throat, suddenly said, “Dear cousin, let us pray!” and instantly, without the least further warning, dropped on the floor howling. Then at last Edward, giving a species of opposition yell, turned and fled, leaving the enemy master of the field by that *coup de main*.

He banged the door after him, and in the blind fury of his soul rushed into John Drewe’s cabinet. He, Sunday notwithstanding, sat and wrote there as usual. The Sabbath shone no day of rest to him. Not troubling himself much about the fitness of things, Mr. Hartley presently began to relieve his outraged feelings.

“How you ever let such a fellow into your house I can’t conceive,” said he angrily. “You can’t expect any gentleman to visit you if you do!”

“You needn’t come,” said John.

“But I did. I found the brute there. How could I expect to meet such a swine in any decent house!”

“You needn’t have stayed,” said John.

“I tell you,” said Edward violently, but thinking it inexpedient to pursue that branch of the subject, “the fellow has made me unwell. That kind of slang is like a stench; it stinks in my nostrils worse than valerian! Such puddle as that to get through must keep all but human pigs out of the conventicle. Pah! to watch that fat-faced snob clap a text, like a slice of ham, between two bits of bread and butter, and mixing his

prayers and his brandy and water, like a sort of devil's punch!"

And Mr. Hartley flung himself out of John Drewe's cabinet, and down two flights of stairs into the "Place," in even a far worse ill-humour than when he came.

He marched up and down Blancheville for some hours, so very much disgusted with Mr. William Pidgely, that he could hardly help puckering up his own graceful countenance with abhorrence, as he strode about thinking of him. You see Mr. Hartley considered himself, not exactly virtuous certainly, but quite a refined, sensitive, and, above all, honest sort of sinner. What especially revolted him was the HYPOCRISY of that "fat-faced snob" whom he had found (and, alas! left) *tête-à-tête* with the fair Susan. Holding her hand too!—he could swear to that. What did she mean by permitting such a confounded liberty? It appears that this young gentleman of the Pharisee persuasion, while engaged after the Pharisee manner in extracting his brother Pidgely's mote, must have been purblind by his own beam. For he actually never saw that Mr. Pidgely had in reality shocked his religious prejudices and pure taste—by keeping Mrs. Drewe from her assignation in the Parc, after church, with himself!

John Drewe, being left alone after that stormy passage of Mr. Hartley through his study, fell into a dreary reverie. Nothing could then be more melancholy to behold than this rugged face beaten by the rough weather of a luckless life. Nothing can be more melancholy, indeed, than the reverie of a man, touching on middle age, who has never realized one dream of his youth. At twenty John Drewe had worked as hard as he did now. But, then, he had not worked alone. He had always at his side that sweet companion whose look cheered, whose touch reanimated, whose whisper said, "Excelsior!" He had hope. And when he thought she had forsaken him, lo! to his fond fancy, heaven sent her again to him in the form of that blue-eyed

saint, his wife. And that had been the vainest dream of all!

And now this mill-work of the brain, without hope or aim any longer beyond shelter and daily food was wearing out the weary hack. This man's physical architecture now looked like a Cyclopean ruin; and he felt himself, as it were, crumbling away. Solid and rough-hewn as he seemed, his mental organization was delicately beautiful. Edward Hartley was a rhinoceros compared with this tender and sensitive John Drewe, whom he thought just a good rough brute. But this delicate organization would be all against his wearing well: and of late, vague pains, vague tremors, vague awful sinkings of body and mind, had often struck him with terror that, in itself, he felt was symptomatic of shattered nerves. His reverie, then, with never a hope or fancy left to sweeten it, was a very bitter one, and his face was miserably sad.

Ah! my friends, when we get knocked about in the campaign of life, bruised inwardly in a way that defies parmaceti, and outwardly so as to shrivel in an east wind; when health is the exception and pain the rule; when the elements of this breathing frame no longer harmonize, but jar and jangle out of tune; when we are in our thirties instead of our twenties or our teens—then the glorious pavilion of the imagination, which for us overcanopied the world, drops folded like a scroll, the Titanic aspiration sinks paralyzed, the superb arrogance writhes mortified in dust and ashes.

John Drewe got up presently and stood at the window, though there was not much to look at, and I dare say he did not see it. It was the middle of March, an east wind had begun to whistle spitefully, and the snow was all gone, except as much as served for a wig and tippet to the black statue of somebody, standing on the stones in the midst of the stony "Place." John, looking on this dismal prospect without, from the dismal prospect within ranged by that inward eye which was the torment of his solitude, chanced to catch sight of a pale face at a window in the opposite horn of the crescent,

a window on the same tier of that lugubrious amphitheatre as his own.

His face assumed an expression that instantaneously changed and softened it.

"Poor child!" said he to himself, "I'll go and see her."

He put on his hat and went.

CHAPTER IV

THE LETTER.

HELEN HARTLEY was still standing at the window when Mr. Drewe walked into her sitting-room. She shook hands with him, and said a few words coldly cheerful. John Drewe looked at the poor girl with a kindly manly compassion he could hardly keep out of his eyes. Somehow he never did look at her without instantly recalling the time he had seen her first, between six and seven years before; when he had involuntarily spouted Homer to his old schoolfellow about the lovely eyes of that youthful Juno; when her extreme youth and extreme beauty had startled and dazzled him. He remembered how he had talked to himself when he left them—how he had said in his own mind, even then, "Poor child! this man is as a god unto her, and to him this gem of a girl he has torn from her mother's breast is but a tinsel toy, like another!"

But Helen had certainly not lost her beauty, which unhappiness rather became and enhanced. Sorrow very seldom can make young folks ugly. Her pale face, with its large plaintive brown eyes, was very grave and still; her voice and movements were very composed; she was exquisitely quiet—that was all.

"How rosy your little boy looks," said she to John.

Less polite than Mrs. Drewe, she did not ask him after *his* wife. "Pauline brings him to see me sometimes, and I met him to-day as I came from church. I always make him talk English."

"You are not looking well, yourself," blurted out John, and was sorry he had said it when he saw her colour.

She answered, with a laugh, that she was quite well: she never was ill: she thought she must paint, for her pale face cheated people out of a vast deal of pity, and made her look like an interesting invalid, which she certainly was not.

Then John asked her if she had good news of her mother, feeling that that was the chink of light to which he had best turn her eyes.

And they lighted up directly, those beautiful yearning eyes, as she said she had heard that morning. Mamina was quite well and happy now, with grandpapa, who would never part with her again, she supposed.

"Then," thought John, "you don't tell her your troubles, you poor child, you good wife, you brave woman! And to be sure, if you did, she could give you no more comfort than you get now, in her mother-love."

"Do you know," said he, suddenly, after a pause, "I am going to pick a quarrel with you, Mrs. Hartley. Why have you left off coming to see my wife?"

Yes, he knew very well it would be an outrageous question to ask, but he thought he knew very well what he was about in asking it; and that it was wisest and kindest to broach the matter. He meant very kindly indeed. He had not the least idea, poor man, that his own case was not a bit better than hers whom he heartily wished to comfort a little.

Helen blushed rosy with surprise and pain, startled by the apparent cruelty or stupidity of this attack. Then she replied gravely, with a face as white as ever:

"You must excuse my not having returned Mrs. Drewe's visits."

John Drewe had much more tact than most men; yet, obtuse in the superstition of his heart, he persisted:

"My wife is a simple soul: she has seen nothing of the world, and is shy, and a little afraid of you, I fancy. But she is very gentle, and intelligent, and *good*. Don't misunderstand her, my dear Mrs. Hartley."

He said it meaningly: it was the only way in which he dared to impress on her what he himself implicitly believed. For John Drewe had never yet doubted the angelic purity of his wife. He longed to be able to speak openly, to make Helen feel, as he did, that her inconstant husband's idle caprice for Susan must die out of itself, being the one-sided caprice it was. He wished her to understand that he restrained his own feelings of anger, and bitter indignation, because he respected the innocent unconsciousness of his wife, who was, in fact, so ignorant of the world, and of evil, as not even to perceive or appreciate Edward's attentions as a less pure-minded woman would. He heartily forgave poor jealous Helen for doubting his saintly Susan, but he thought if he could induce her to rely, as fully as he did himself, on the artless innocence of his wife, she would be a little comforted, and at least attach less significance to this fresh proof of her husband's levity. He believed that Edward's capricious admiration would be very much affected by its ceasing to seem of importance to anybody; and that if he saw his wife on terms of easy cordiality with the object of it, the *faux-air* of intrigue that charmed him would vanish, and the caprice with it. The poor man meant so kindly, and reasoned so well—only, like a madman, on false premises!

Helen changed countenance a little, only a little, at this insistence. With her fine intuitive perception she discovered the good faith and kind motive of John Drewe. It pained her pride to be offered comfort like alms, but she did not resent it; nor did she, as nine women out of ten would, despise this blindly confiding husband, offering her pity and comfort he might soon feel his own need of. On the contrary, his loyalty

touched her so much that she tried hard to speak gently, and to keep the haughtiness out of her voice, even when she named his wife. She answered plainly, to finish the matter, but as briefly as possible, that Mrs. Drewe and herself certainly did not suit each other: it was quite natural he should think the fault hers: she was willing he should: she begged he would let the matter rest there: she asked him, as a favour, to say no more about it.

After that, how could even blundering John persist? He heaved a sigh of disappointment, and then begged her pardon for vexing her, and got up and walked slowly up and down the little room.

"My dear Mrs. Hartley," said he, presently, "excuse my rude persistence. The fact is, I—I should be so glad of your sympathy about my poor Susan. You see I made a great mistake myself about her. I married her because I was so much in love that I was too willing to fancy she liked me a great deal better than she did, or possibly could. She mistook herself, too. She was so gentle, and dutiful, and absurdly grateful to me for delivering her out of the Nettlefold house of bondage, that she thought she could be happy with me. But I soon saw she was and must be, on the contrary, miserable with one so unsuitable to her in every way. In fact," said John, stopping opposite the looking-glass behind the stove, and pointing to his image there with a face of extreme disapprobation, "how could any woman fancy a great ill-conditioned surly brute like *that*, you know!"

After which candid appeal he took two or three more turns, and resumed:

"If I had been a genius she might have taken to me, because you women have a tendency to fall in love with geniuses, to your cost. I believe I shouldn't have made her any the better husband, or any the happier—but that is all bosh, I am *not* a genius, and she can't mistake me for one, which would have come to the same thing. My abilities are extremely moderate, as she cannot fail to perceive, or I should not have done my possible, for twelve or fourteen years, and be a mere book-

seller's hack now, earning daily bread and no more. There's nothing in me to be proud of, or create any illusion about. Then, you know, she is a perfect saint herself, and was sorely disappointed, no doubt, that she couldn't make me one. I fear she has had a secret horror of me, since she found how far I disagreed with her on certain points she considers vital, but which I honestly don't think have anything at all to do with religion. I respect her tenderness of conscience, and piety, and angelic purity so much, that I never would argue with her, or vex and pain her by expressing my own opinions on those subjects. Far less would I interfere with the religious exercises in which she finds all her comfort, poor little dear soul, disappointed as she is in every way with *me*."

Helen, painfully listening, was going involuntarily to say something to the effect, that a remarkably intelligent charming little son was not altogether to be left out of a woman's sum of blessings, even supposing her husband a failure. But she checked herself with a scornful thought of the heartlessness which was so complete as not to be taken in detail. John went on: he was comforting himself a little by this rare expression of his sorrows, and felt he had Helen's sympathy, if his own were rejected by her. And John was one of those men (generally rough sort of fellows to look at), who particularly need the tender ministry of women.

"The only thing I can't bear with temper, as I ought, is the presence of a certain cousin William of hers. The man is an unmitigated snob—which in itself I don't object to, because he can't help it, and might be an excellent fellow that I could respect, all the same. My wife was a small tradesman's daughter, and, of course, her relations are not likely to be anything but vulgar. I shouldn't care twopence about that, but what I do care about is honesty, principle, goodness; and I am persuaded that this William Pidgely is a dirty hypocrite. Cleverness and fine manners are common enough, compared to goodness, Mrs. Hartley; and if we can't have

that, hang the other two. But my wife's cousin I believe to be a knave as well as a snob, and my poor simple Susan considers him one of the elect, being utterly incapable of fathoming his hypocrisy. You see they were boy and girl together, and, when her father died, his gave her a home, till old Nettlefold took her to be his crabbed daughter's bondmaiden. It does cut me to the heart to see poor Susan finding more congeniality and comfort even in the society of that snuffing rogue, than she can in mine. There she is, to-day, petting and cockering him, and praying with him, I dare say—for *me*, dear soul! I can't be commonly civil to him, so I get out of the way, not to vex her. The man and his irreverent jargon are odious to me—offensive beyond expression."

"Is Mr. Pidgely at your house now?" asked Helen, wondering if her husband were there, too, praying for poor John *en tiers* with that pious couple!

"Yes," rejoined John, with a sigh; "he passes through Blancheville every few months on business. He is a traveller for some London tradesman, and he always bestows his leisure moments on my poor house."

So John Drewe ran on, relieving his mind very much by this harmless abuse of his wife's obnoxious cousin.

He was not a patient or reticent man, only generous and unselfish enough to put very great restraint on his rough out-speaking temper, where he thought his wife's peace and comfort were concerned. Men in general have much less natural reticence than women, and are sooner moved beyond patience and silence. In fact, men have intellectual, and women moral patience; and except of that intellectual kind which helps them to knowledge, Patience seems with men to be a Virtue that does not often survive their copy-books.

John, in his lonely room, had sat and fumed over his grievances and griefs, like a kettle left on hot coals, sure to boil over at last. But he had always boiled over solitarily, with a great waste of heart and health.

Now, having come, urged by a very kindly impulse, to comfort poor Helen a little, and failed, he yet went away

all the better himself, for only the sympathy in a woman's eyes, and in her listening silence. For Helen did not, could not, force herself to suggest comfort in a mutual trouble that she knew past comfort—which bitter knowledge made her eyes all the kinder to him.

When John Drewe left her it was already dusk; and, swept dry in the March wind, the stony "Place" looked in the twilight almost as white as if the snow lay there still. He walked twice or thrice backwards and forwards on the pavement below the houses before he went in at his own door. He felt somehow softened and chastened by the time he had spent with that kind honest young Helen—as if the impulse that had sent him to her had had its mission, and not been a mistaken one, after all. As he stopped at his door, the noble and solemn voice of a great cathedral chimed the half hour after six. John had another impulse, and went, with a tender and loyal heart, straight to his wife's sitting-room.

She sat, with her elbow on the table, her cheek on her hand, reading the Bible by the light of a lamp. There were a few tracts and religious magazines on the table, and her small desk, with her little bunch of keys in the lock. She looked beautifully fair, pure, and peaceful, but her face a little pinker than usual, as she glanced up on her husband's entrance. He nodded cheerfully, said it was a cold evening, and went and stood at the stove warming his hands.

"Has your cousin been gone long?" said he presently to begin the conversation.

"About half an hour," she answered, in the usual calm, chill tone to which her husband was accustomed, without being reconciled. He struggled against the discouragement of it now.

"Susy," said he, "if you don't mind, will you read aloud a little? I should so enjoy resting here, and listening to a bit of the Bible in your nice, gentle voice."

She assented, in a cold dutiful way, and asked what part he would wish her to read.

"Anything—any part; you can't choose amiss, my

dear: just where you were reading to yourself when I came in; or, stay," added he. "*I have* a fancy; there is a very favourite chapter of mine in St. John: let me find it."

And before she could anticipate his movement, he leaned across, and took the Bible. She uttered an involuntary cry, snatching at it, then at a letter that slipped from between the leaves, and fell on the floor, beyond her reach.

John had picked it up in a moment, and even then would have given it back to her without glancing at it, and with an apology for his abrupt seizure of the Bible, but that her face, pale with terror, sent the first suspicion like an arrow to his heart! He glanced at the letter: it was a sealed cover addressed to Edward Hartley. The address was blurred, for it had been thrust wet into the Bible, whose ink-stained leaves had refused to keep the shameful secret. Even then John Drewe's manliness and honour still governed his rough temper. He held out the note to her.

"Open it," said he, sternly enough, but in a low voice, "and give it me yourself, open, to read. If I am wronging you, God forgive me!"

She sat with lips apart, visibly frightened, her eyes fixed on the fatal note. He hoped for some moment still—hoped that she might only be scared by his manner of speaking.

"I beg you to open it," said he gently; "I beg you to forgive me if I am wronging you."

Then she made a vain clutch at the note, losing her last chance of escape, or of appearing innocent, even if she were so. Had she taken it from him quietly, as if to open it, she might still have outwitted John, torn it into fifty pieces, and called the deed an impulse of indignant outraged innocence. He might have believed in her still. But now her game was lost, and she sat pale, afraid, and dumb, rather through surprise than shame. Her husband took the note from its envelope and read it slowly through, stooping, as he stood to the light of

the lamp. Then he crushed the paper in his fingers, and, straightening himself, looked down at her. His great broad-built figure, and rugged massive face, with its large beard a shade darker than the shaggy fair hair, had a kind of grandeur in them at that moment, as he stood looking down fixedly, with solemn blue eyes, at the worthless loveliness that had duped him so long. But as the woman cowered, compelled like one magnetized to meet his look, she suddenly saw a strange shadow, something awful and nameless, visibly smite her husband's face. Twice he lifted his hand feebly to his head, then fell heavily helplessly forward on the floor, his forehead on his wife's foot, and lay there dead or senseless !

CHAPTER V

AT NO. III.

ABOUT half an hour afterwards, Pauline, the *bonne*, clattered across the "Place," and knocking impatiently at No. 30, stood the next moment, with a scared face, breathless, gesticulating, struggling to speak, in Helen's presence. Her agitation made her quite incoherent, even when she found her voice. Helen could only guess that something terrible had happened at No. 3; and a horrid vision of discovery—Edward, an exasperated husband, a sudden fatal deed of revenge, or self-defence—turned her icy-cold and sick. But she sat down, and, convulsively grasping the arms of her chair, said, in a strangely imperative whisper :

"Speak slower. What has happened ? "

Then the well-meaning, frightened *bonne* told her how Madame Veuve Beeck (*le propriétaire*), sitting in her own chamber, under the salon of Madame Drewe, the house particularly still and empty because it was Sunday, had heard suddenly a heavy fall overhead, then piercing

cries, and, hastening upstairs, had found madame out on the landing, who screamed, wrung her hands, and could not speak a word.

"Me, I am upstairs with *le cher petit*, who is asleep in his little bed: I hear, I run—I leave madame my mistress to Madame Beeck; I fall into the salon. Ah, *ma chère dame*, I see no one but my poor monsieur, who lies dead on the floor! But I lift him; it seems to me that he breathes; we carry him, Madame Beeck and I, upon his bed à côté. All the time there is madame my mistress, who cannot look upon her husband, runs away and screams, screams, and laughs, and explains nothing at all. It is to go mad to witness all that! I run for monsieur the doctor, at No. 5—yes, yes, *Dieu merci!* he is at home. I send him quick, quick! and me, I hasten to you, *ma chère petite dame*, to beg you of your goodness to come and help us."

Helen vaguely conjectured what had happened. Discovery had probably come; how, mattered little, and the shock, so utterly unexpected, had struck down the husband at once. Helen had noticed, as no one else had done, John Drewe's toil-broken health, ripe for this catastrophe. While Pauline was telling her that Madame Beeck was *méchante*, was angry at the disturbance in her house, was grumbling at the chance of a dead or dying inmate, was rude and unfeeling to madame, and rough even to *ce pauvre monsieur*.

"There is no one but me; and me, I am but a poor ignorant girl, *ma chère dame*; without you, what can I do?"

While Pauline thus volubly implored her aid, Helen was recovering herself, and bracing her nerves for action. She knew better than Pauline did, that John Drewe's little family lived from hand to mouth—that toiling right hand, which might now be laid idle in death, or deadly sickness.

How she could be of use she hardly yet knew. But she could at least receive his wishes from himself if he were capable of expressing any. He might ask her to

write to his family, or to take his little boy. She might, at any rate, go at once with Pauline to the bedside of her stricken neighbour, supposing him to be still abandoned by his wife. It cost Helen very little to set aside *les convenances* that were hollow, and scruples that were selfish, and she hardly thought at all about Mrs. Drewe. Helen was breaking her heart for jealousy of her husband, but she had never stooped to personal dislike of the woman he preferred to her. And there is a divinity in the pureness of modest women, that hedges them from prudish fear: she believed that John Drewe's wife was her husband's mistress; but although the belief had caused her to avoid contact with this woman under ordinary circumstances, it could not for a moment restrain her from personally serving John Drewe, whom she liked, pitied, and honoured, in his need of her. So she bravely went to No. 3, with Pauline.

She waited a minute before entering, while the *bonne* ran upstairs; but Pauline came down again immediately, and reported that Madame la Propriétaire had retreated to her own quarters; that madame was lying asleep or exhausted on the sofa in the sitting-room; and that her poor master was left all alone with the doctor, who had bled him, and brought him to life.

Then Helen went upstairs, and entered the dim sick-room. Poor John Drewe had opened his eyes, but shut them again, and now lay in his bed in a state that looked a good deal more like death than life. The doctor was washing his lancet in a corner of the room. He was a jolly little Blanchevillian, intelligent, cautious, and conceited; and understanding English very well, but talking it very ill, insisted on conversing with Madame l'Anglaise in that language.

"Ab, madame! parmit zat we spik in your tong. I loav ze Anglis; I spik him capital, is it not? Mistair, my patient,—yais, yais; pardon—he have pushed a sigh. At present he breeze very nice. Be quiet, madame, he goes to be al right. I come to see again before I bed my-self. Ah, you demand what has mistair?

You demand has he a sort of feet? Ah, you have right; zere is very much sort of feet. But see you, mistair must be wash very careful. Eh! ze hot or ze cold barse? I comprehend nuzzing at all, madame. It acts not of ze barse: it acts of well wash—overlook—*ah, bah, done, survociller*—and, eef you plis, ze zings to write.”

The touchy little doctor, affronted at poor Helen's innocent mistake, casting a slur on his favourite accomplishment, abruptly turned away, wrote his prescription, and gave it to Pauline to take to the chemist. Then he went and looked attentively at his motionless patient, put his little plump fingers on the great rigid hand and wrist, and on the heart, made an elaborate bow to madame, and vanished. Left alone in the silent, feebly-lighted room, Helen seated herself beside the bed, facing the sick man, where she could discern the slightest change in his aspect.

It was a strange position, some might call it a false one; but Helen felt neither doubt nor embarrassment. On the contrary, this call on her energy, this demand for self-abnegation; above all, this feeling that she could comfort and serve a suffering brother, had already comforted and served herself. She looked with intense and self-forgetful compassion on the blanched bearded face in the shadowy depths of the bed; its features locked as if in death, and she touched affectionately, almost reverently, the poor helpless heroic right hand that lay without life, and clutched as if in death-agony. And as she watched him, thinking very pitifully of him, it came into her heart to pray for poor John. And praying silently in her soul, as she sat there, her noble innocent eyes fixed on his face, it seemed to her that all hard thoughts, resentments, sense of injury, naughty scorns, dwindled and died out of her as they might on her own death-bed.

She felt that she could think of those who had trespassed against her, and forgive them; as perhaps we shall all, even the most vindictive of us, come at the very last to remember and pardon our enemies, as we hope for pardon ourselves. Ah! dare we wait till that supreme

moment to *mean* that which we dare say to God—mocking “Our Father” with the Christian’s daily prayer!

Helen preached this little sermon to herself as she kept watch in that silent room. Dim spiritual heights within her seemed touched by the rays of Divine Love.

Her heart yearned without bitterness to her husband, and even yonder frail woman found admittance to her pity and her prayer.

She was recalled to less exalted considerations by the sudden darkening of the solitary candle, and turning round saw it sink and expire in its socket. At the same time a bright line became visible under the closed door which led into the adjoining room. She at once rose to obtain a fresh light, which was so necessary in the sick-chamber, and which she would not wait for until Pauline’s return. The remembrance that Mrs. Drewe was probably lying asleep in that other room did not hinder her. She was absolutely, in these moments, as divested of personality as a sister of charity; and she was conscious of no selfish emotion as she noiselessly felt her way to the door and pushed it open.

Mrs. Drewe lay on the hard comfortless couch in the sitting-room, in a deep but very comfortless sleep. No one had tried to make it better. Her limbs were huddled and uncomposed, just as she had cast herself down, or fallen exhausted, and cried till she slept. The lamp on the table shone full on her face, unshaded; her head, with all its bright tumbled fair hair, had sunk painfully, and slipped from the stony bolster of the sofa. Her pretty pink bud of a mouth, half-open, had a grieved complaining expression; her long light-brown lashes, still wet, lay on flushed cheeks, still glazed with tears. She looked as lovely, innocent, and piteous as a child in disgrace.

Careful not to waken her, Helen went softly towards the mantelpiece for a waxlight there; but, as she passed in front of the couch, glanced at the sleeper.

Pity, the gentlest and purest, impelled Helen to pause, and, with a touch as light and tender as love’s, to raise the fallen head, and slip under it a soft cushion taken

from a chair at hand. As she did this little deed of charity that was so great, the young sister of mercy looked up—and met her husband's eyes! He stood just within the door. Helen coloured, faltered something about the candle she had come for, and, turning, took it from the mantelpiece.

She tried with all her might to conquer her trouble, and steady her shaking hands. She looked about for a morsel of paper to light the candle from the lamp, and found that Edward had come up to help her. On the table there was nothing but the little desk, the religious tracts, and the Bible; but he observed a torn envelope on the carpet, and picked it up. As he was going to twist it into an *allumette*, he saw that it was addressed to himself, in Mrs. Drewe's hand. He glanced up, and perceived that Helen had seen it too. Nevertheless, he used it, as he had intended, to light the candle; and, as he gave it to her, looked hard at her with a singular expression.

She was very white, as usual, but a strange touching sweetness breathed from the marble face, and those beautiful pathetic ox-eyes, that fell timidly under his curious stare, had somewhat indescribably pure in their lucid depths.

Helen thanked him in a very low voice, and glided away into the next room.

She put the candle on a table, and sat down in the place she had quitted a few minutes before. She was very much shaken, now; her husband's strange look sorely troubled and perplexed her; she had to struggle with a nervous inclination to burst out crying; she bit her lips, and locked her fingers together, and fought hard to force her thoughts away, safe from self altogether.

But presently she found them recurring to that significant empty envelope, and she could not help wondering how much Edward knew of the immediate cause of the catastrophe, supposing it to be anything like what she had conjectured from the first. Now, Edward, in fact, knew hardly so much as she did herself. He had come

to No. 3, when he was tired of walking about Blancheville, had walked off the worst of his ill-humour, and had concluded that the obnoxious Pidgely would have disappeared for that day at least. In the absence of Paulino and other functionaries, Madame la Propriétaire found herself under the degrading necessity of answering the door.

She was robed in a blanket, imperfectly veiling her night costume, her head tied up in a far from becoming yellow pocket-handkerchief (relic of *le feu* Beeck). In her general effect she had a good deal of bilious chimpanzee about her. She informed Edward briefly, in a tone of intense and bitter indignation, that Monsieur Drewe had half-killed *her* by falling down on the carpet in a thundering apoplexy, and that madame had had an attack of the nerves, and had screamed till her (Madame Veuve Beeck's) head was veritably cracked like an egg. That, in this damaged condition, she had put herself to bed, and should at once put herself back again, leaving all the world to tumble down dead in thundering apoplexies at their pleasure. And instantly retired into the fortress of her sacred apartment, shutting the door on the nose of monsieur.

This extremely sketchy outline of circumstances was all Edward had yet obtained ; but conscience might well fill it in.

Having mounted the stairs softly, and softly opened the door, in deference to the neighbourhood of sickness, he was struck dumb at the wholly unexpected sight that met his eyes in Susan's salon. The empty envelope directed to himself, and lying on the floor, was very suggestive ; but his wife's presence altogether mystified him : he was no less disturbed and perplexed than herself, and a good deal more discomfited than she with her clear conscience could possibly be.

He looked after Helen in a very irresolute state of mind, which was, indeed, a very rare state for Mr. Edward Hartley to be in.

Should he get certainty out of all this uncertainty

by questioning Helen?—at least, would it not be extremely natural that he should ask his wife how it came to pass that he found her in that galley, installed as a species of Béguine at No. 3? So natural would it be, that he felt his silence must seem highly unnatural; yet he hesitated, struck dumb by conscience, or some other mental impression not analysed. It is remarkable that, although he held this hasty conference with himself, standing close to the couch where the lovely Susan now slumbered comfortably, on the pillow adjusted by his wife, Mr. Hartley never once cast his eyes on that sleeping beauty. Just then Pauline came laboriously tiptoeing up-stairs, on her stocking-soles, and looked into the salon. Edward signed to her to go back, and, joining her on the landing, immediately desired her to tell him exactly what had occurred. She could only repeat what she had told Helen, and further relate how she had run, bewildered and frightened at the responsibility that had suddenly fallen on her, to No. 30, and implored madame his wife to come back with her, and direct her, and arrange things properly, and stay with monsieur till madame her mistress got well.

Edward saw she had nothing more to tell, and that the heels of her Flemish imagination had not enough spring in them for a leap to suspicion or conjecture.

“And your master is recovering?” said he.

“The doctor says so, monsieur. But he was lying like a dead body when I went away. Pardon, monsieur, I must now take in the medicine. Is monsieur coming in?”

Edward considered a moment. “Go and see if his eyes are open,” said he. And when she reported, after a hasty inspection, that monsieur still lay with his eyes shut, exactly as she had left him, Edward stole into the sick-room, under the wing of the sturdy *bonne*. It was very feebly lighted, but he could distinguish the motionless form in the bed, and the motionless watcher beside it.

Helen was painfully astonished at his entrance. She

had some experience of her husband's peculiar insensibilities, and his indifference to popular opinion when it crossed his will or whim, yet she was hardly prepared to see him voluntarily enter that sick-room. He came quietly up to her side, and stood there, looking down on poor John's death-like face. He stood there so long that Helen glanced up at him, half hoping, I believe, to see some sign of feeling, perhaps remorse, on his own countenance. She was utterly confounded to find his eyes fixed on herself. He must have been watching the expression of her candid face, and had probably read it easily enough. As she looked hastily away again, her eyes fell on John Drewe's hand, and she immediately perceived that the fingers had opened, and that a written crumpled paper had become visible in the palm, which lay upwards. Helen felt something very like horror when she saw Edward, who had perceived the circumstance as soon as she did, gently draw the paper from the poor unresisting hand, and coolly examine it.

Helen could not repress a low cry of remonstrance, or even a hurried gesture. Edward heeded neither, but muttering "I thought so," carried the paper, evidently a woman's note, close to the candle, and there deliberately read it. He did not turn his back, or take any pains to conceal his feelings while he read; and had not Helen scrupled to watch him, she would have seen his features express the most profound contempt, and even disgust.

When he had finished, he stood and considered a minute, then put the letter into his pocket, and returned to the bedside. He looked for a moment at the sick man, with undisguised regret and compassion. Then he laid his own hand on the helpless hand he had just rifled, and turned and looked full at his wife, with a sort of grave smile. "*You see*," said he; and then, without a word more, was going to the door, when it opened, and the doctor re-appeared.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM HARTLEY HALL TO CALAIS.

CAPTAIN HARTLEY, with a flower-pot in his hand, came from the garden into the room that had been his father's study, through the large French window. It was still quite light, a minute or two past sunset on a latter August evening. Outside, the fair wide west-country landscape was just mellowing goldenly.

But Captain Hartley was nearly blind now, and did not see, till he came quite close, that there was somebody seated in his great leather chair. Somebody that looked rather a small gentleman in the big chair, and whose remarkably clear eyes quite shone from its profound depths. And somebody, as Robert Hartley approached, rose up quietly, and quietly grasped his hand.

"God bless me—sir! who are you?" And in the same breath, "Ashton, my dear friend! Is it possible?"

"Yes, thank God! it's you and I once more, my dear Hartley. How glad I am!"

"Glad! it's too good to believe. Stop, let me put down this pot. I nearly let it fall."

"What is it? Black Princes?"

"Black Princes!—no, it's—oh, I see. You remember everything, my Sahib. But dinner—you must have some dinner. I've dined—the doctors make me dine early."

"Had it ages ago, at Toxeter, at Hallet's. I was ravenous when I got there. I propose coffee and pipes instead."

"And a fire: don't deny that you want a fire."

"I don't. I am but a poor chilly old Qui-hi; and I should like to sit and look at that great Claude in your window frame without shivering."

"James, a fire here; and take care there's a good one in Mr. Ashton's room."

Pipes, coffee, a crackling log behind, the Claude in front: they sat at the open window, each in his easy chair, and chatted twilight into dark.

"This is delightful!" said Ashton. "If yonder landscape is a poem, a hymn, the fire is a charming bit of prose—and prose and poetry are the body and soul of our daily life, and I call this keeping them together."

"Do you smell the clematis?—and just listen to that thrush," said poor Robert, holding up his dim-eyed face, and sniffing rapturously. He got the poem through his nose and ears, you perceive, though at one entrance quite shut out.

"You have been looked for here these three days," said he, presently.

"I have been at Danbye," rejoined Ashton, "and could not get away before, as it was a sort of peace visit, to bury the hatchet. I found a most irresistibly amiable invitation from the old Colonel in London. You see, he can't bear to lose sight of his daughter for even forty-eight hours, and it was the only way he knew to prevent my sister-in-law going to town to meet me."

"Well, that's all right, and as it should be, and I am glad things have ended so," said Robert, benignantly. "But now tell me the last news of the young folks."

"Don't they write to you?"

"Oh, yes, Helen does. But you see she knows I must have her letters read to me by James. James is a very faithful, discreet, superior lad, I assure you, and a great comfort to me; but of course Helen feels it's not like writing for myself only."

Ashton looked most compassionately and admiringly at his poor solitary friend, who spoke with such patience and resignation of his terrible calamity, unmitigated as it was by the affectionate ministry that his tender spirit must pine for. Mr. Hallet had just told Ashton that he verily believed Robert Hartley took a vague, unconscious, innocently fanatic comfort in his lack of comfort, and that it positively helped him to bear that misfortune of large fortune which had befallen him.

"The young folk are very well," said Ashton. "My sister had a letter from Helen yesterday, written in capital spirits, apparently. They are just now at Les Étangs, the little Richmond of Blancheville, you know."

"John Drewe and his wife live at Blancheville too, don't they? Helen wrote to me about them when she and Edward first went there, last Christmas."

"What did she say?"

"Only that John worked hard for every penny they had to live on, and Mrs. Drewe was a very pretty woman, and they had a nice little boy—and that is all I know about them."

"Well, I can tell you something more. Mrs. Drewe was a Methodist shopkeeper's daughter, and a distant relation of old Nettlefold's, who took the orphan girl to be his daughter's toadeater—meaning to be kind, I dare say. But Mrs. and Miss Nettlefold couldn't be pleasant people to eat toads with, and I fancy she was glad enough to marry John Drewe when he fell in love with her, seven years ago. Nevertheless, she has now gone back to live with Miss Nettlefold! Old Nettlefold left his daughter every penny he could scrape; and she lives on her own hook at Fulham, while the mother sticks to Danhaye, which saves her jointure, to say nothing of contingencies. Miss Nettlefold used to be a rabid Protestant, but she appears of late to have come out of Exeter Hall, and adopted the High Candlestick doctrines."

"And where's John Drewe?"

"At Blancheville still, or rather at Les Étangs, with the Hartleys. He has been very ill (an odd time for his loving wife to leave him), and our dear little Helen seems to take great pleasure in nursing him, and looking after his little boy. What I tell you, Helen told her mother; just the facts, without particulars or comment."

"Very odd affair, it looks," was Robert Hartley's observation; and Ashton went on to talk of Helen and her marriage.

"They seem happy together now, don't they?" said

he, interrogatively. "You saw them in London last year, what did you think of him?"

"Edward is a fine young man," said Robert, rather hesitatingly; "a handsome, elegant, eccentric sort of young fellow; a strong character, I should say, and very clever."

"But what sort of disposition?" persisted Ashton, anxiously. "Do tell me frankly what your impression was, Hartley, and if you think he makes my poor girl happy. You see the marriage has turned out anything but a prosperous one in all other ways, and if it is not happy through affection, that pet child of ours has a hard fate."

"She was very much in love with her husband still, when I saw them," said Robert Hartley.

"And he——?"

"Well, it certainly struck me, Edward was not a tender-hearted man, and not at all in love with his wife—not exactly unkind, and never rough."

"Indifferent?" said Ashton.

Hartley nodded, saying:

"I was afraid so. And she is perfect, Ashton."

"Poor child!" said Ashton, bitterly.

"You see my sister could or would tell me little about Helen's lot in marriage; but from that little, and still more from a certain flash in the mother's eye when she spoke ever so briefly of her daughter's husband, I strongly suspect—I very much fear—the child has had a great deal to complain of, and has never complained at all! No, not even to her mother, perhaps; and what her mother knows, or guesses, or has got out of her, *she* won't tell, even to me: women have their code of honour, and quite right. But, Hartley, I love that child dearly; I loved that little thing at first sight. If she had been my own I couldn't have loved that baby better, from when she first sat on my knee and put her little arms round my neck. Dear little bird, how pretty and how loving she was! Look here, old friend! the only woman I ever wished to marry married another

man : then I came home and my poor brother was dead, and his little child crept into my heart. It was such a pretty rose to creep and blossom about a ruin, I thought!—sentimental, I dare say ; but I meant soberly and steadfastly to be a father to her. And I constantly wrote to her, and treasured all her little pretty letters from the first that her little fist ever wrote. They were the comfort and hope of my solitary life. From those I saw what a sweet flower of intelligence she was growing. Then I confess her hasty rash marriage was a great shock to me, and I blamed her poor mother, who must have suffered far more than I did. I own I never liked your nephew, when he was a child ; and I did not like what Louisa reported of him as he grew up ; and I did not like what I heard from other sources of the sort of life he led abroad ; and I did not like Helen's after-marriage letters : I soon felt there was something wrong ; yet I have tried to persuade myself I was suspicious, and prejudiced against her husband. I was well pleased at the spirit in which he took his trying reverse of fortune, and I could appreciate, without exactly approving, his eccentric and obstinate rejection of all money help, even for his wife, from you, and me, and everybody.

“ But what I cannot forgive—what I cannot bear to think of—is that fellow's selfish cruelty : if he took my poor child from her mother's love and mine, and had nothing but a short-lived heartless fancy to give her in lieu of all—something coarser than our girl might have served his turn. Confound him ! ”

Robert Hartley had seldom seen his friend so moved ; he tried to say some words of comfort, and to represent, truly enough, that these misgivings were but misgivings after all ; and presently Ashton could think and talk with his accustomed calmness. He acknowledged that this sort of lunging at Helen's imaginary bad husband was but an avuncular Quixotism, and then changed the conversation by asking what the Seabay news was.

“ Poor Dr. Tottle died last month,” said Hartley. “ He was getting infirm, and he took a severe cold through

going in all weathers to visit a patient. It was a poor lady, a governess out of work, who had broken her ankle, and could not afford to call in a doctor that would expect to be paid. Poor Tottle cured her, and got her a comfortable engagement to boot, but never got over his own illness. It fell on his lungs, and he died in a sort of rapid decline. I went in to see him several times ; there seemed no one to look after him properly, so I persuaded him to come here for change of air ; and here he died, very placid and happy, dear old fellow. He left me his old pony, and all the plants in his little greenhouse."

Yes, Robert Hartley had smoothed the kind old doctor's death-bed, even as the doctor had ministered to that dying woman who had been the fatal comfort of poor Robert's life.

"He is very much missed at Seabay—far more than Mr. Lipley was," added Captain Hartley.

"Ah, yes, my sister-in-law told me when the old Rector died. Of apoplexy, too, just as he always thought he should, and always pretended to think he shouldn't. A common way of talking down one's secret convictions. The present Rector is the Green man, I believe, who was the curate when we lived at Seabay? An Oxford man, who was given to howling sentimental songs, and painfully particular about his boots."

"He howls nothing lighter than Gregorians now ; and, as for boots, I believe he was seen barefoot lately, in some "Highcandlestick" procession, as you'd call it. He even disapproves of the 'priesthood' marrying, which caused a great disappointment to Miss Eliza Lipley, they say, who would have liked to marry him."

"Inconstant Eliza ! She would have liked to marry me. Any more Seabay gossip, Hartley ?"

"No, really I have not. You see I only get my news from my housekeeper, who is a good soul, and a Seabay woman, and comes on any odd pretext to cheer master up a bit, now and then, when she thinks I am moping."

"What sort of clergyman have you got at Hartley-bridge ? My sister said old Drewe had vacated."

"Yes, he chose to go. I do not think I should have disturbed him, and I bore him no malice. I dare say he always acted towards me as he thought I deserved. He lives with his rich son and daughter-in-law. Oh, the new vicar, Mr. Hayes, is an excellent old man, but not likely to live long, I fear. I wish to offer Hallet the living when it is vacant. Hallet's is too poor a one for a man with a large family to do justice to. I know how he feels that, but he himself named Mr. Hayes to me, so I never suspected his own need. Mr. Hayes can just get through the work of this small parish, now his health is failing, after having been condemned to hard labour all his life in various curacies."

"Now, Hartley, my dear fellow, having discussed and dismissed with your blessing everybody else, tell me about yourself. How are you sure your eyes are irrecoverably damaged? Whom have you consulted?"

"The best oculists in London, my Sahib. Never mind," said Robert, with his good melancholy smile, "I have only too much to be thankful for. Don't fancy I repine."

"I don't; but *I* do for you. So the verdict is, you are to make up your mind to the worst, and there's no possible better?"

"Yes. Or at least—well, poor Tottle was always urging me to go to a German place, where it seems there are wonderful eye cures going on."

"To be sure there are! I know of a man who went there with no eyes left, and came back——"

"Eyes right?" said Robert, smiling a little.

"Exactly. Well, isn't it worth while to try? Are not your eyes worth fetching from D——?"

Robert Hartley again smiled faintly, and the top of his cheekbones got very red. He really had not courage to put that innocent fanaticism of his into words. Indeed, he felt like a fool when he did so, even in his own mind, and hardly told *himself* that he looked on his blindness as a judgment that he feared to struggle against, lest worse should befall him.

But Ashton understood what was passing in his mind about as well as he understood it himself. There was a concerted plot among his friends to get him to D——. Tottle had thrown the ball in the air: Hallet, who had visited him frequently during his last illness, and to whom he had spoken with some confidence concerning the D—— oculist, kept it up, with the help, warmly accorded, of Mrs. Widow Hartley. And now Captain Hartley became aware that a special pleader had accepted a brief, and was to follow on the same side.

"*Et tu, Brute,*" said he, half reproachfully.

But Ashton hardened his heart against the dim instinct, or presentiment, to which poor Robert could give no expression that did not cause it to appear morbid and absurd even to himself. Before they parted that night the influence of his dear friend had prevailed, and Robert Hartley had consented to go to D——.

They were to set off in a week's time: they were both to go; visiting "the young folk" at Les Étangs *en route*. Ashton would remain with his friend until the verdict of the great D—— authority was pronounced. If there was hope, Hartley would remain in the care of his faithful servant, while Ashton returned to England on business that could no longer be postponed. If the London sentence were confirmed, the friends would return together, as they went.

This was the programme, the neat disposal of events which Ashton slept on complacently enough. His kind heart delighted in his work. He loved his friend sincerely, and rejoiced to have conquered the morbid feeling bred in that lonely blindness, to which he ascribed Hartley's reluctance to seek relief, and which might, perhaps, be depriving him of years of a brightened life.

He had no misgivings as they drove from the old stone porch through the park woodland, while the sweet September sunrise showed the "fiery finger here and there."

"Courage! dear old friend," said he, and laid an

affectionate hand on his shoulder, as he watched Robert's wistful dejected face. "When your old trees bud again, you shall *see* them, please God."

"Please God," repeated Robert in a low voice; "*but it will not*," he added, so much lower still that Ashton thought it best not to seem to hear it.

Ah, he had been so content only to hear his woods rustle, so satisfied and grateful only to hear the finches pipe, and smell his clove-carnations.

They crossed from Dover to Calais that evening, and in a red sunset stood arm-in-arm on the busy pier.

The rest seemed to Ashton a confused and horrible dream, of which he could furnish no coherent record. One moment, Robert Hartley standing placidly, a smile on his poor blind face at some jest of his friend's; the next—dropped bleeding against Ashton's shoulder—in his arms, that caught him as he slid to the ground! A single sharp scream from him as he fell—then an uproar of many tongues on that crowded pier—a quick rush of many feet that chased a murderer—shouts for the police—shrieks of terrified women—women fainting, one in strong hysterics, laughing: she had been so close, she had touched the assassin, her clothes were splashed with blood. And Ashton on the pavement, holding up the lifeless head, the fixed ashy face, crying out for a surgeon, a surgeon for God's sake! His servant and Hartley's have run different ways to fetch one; but is there no doctor in all that throng? Yes, a young man comes hurrying up; and at the same instant, clutched savagely by iron hands, dragged back through the shrinking crowd, dogged, silent, unresisting, amidst furious faces and furious words—the murderer! Ashton does not even glance at him yet: his eyes, with all his thoughts, are fixed on his friend, or move only to the surgeon.

"Dying?" he says huskily, as the young man stoops, making his brief examination.

"Dead, monsieur," answers the surgeon, gently laying down that heavy hand, and closing that bloody

shirt again over that stopped heart. Then he takes out his handkerchief and wipes his own dabbled fingers.

"My God!" groans Ashton, "what cowardly villain!" And his eye falls on the assassin they hold before him there.

"Datchet!" he cries, "you infernal ruffian, at your devil's work again!"

"Monsieur recognises him! Knock his hat off, that monsieur may see him better."

With his Guernsey shirt partly torn from his lean shoulders and chest, with his bare half-bald head and rough grizzled beard, with his red eyes gleaming out of a wrinkled gin-sodden face, with his old dog's snarl—Datchet stands there and owns his deed.

"I remembers ye. Yes, I be Datchet. Eighteen year back I killed my lass along of *he* (nodding at the dead man). *You* seen me do it; and now I done for *he* too; I always meant to, if ever I got the chance. It's all right: I'm ready to swing now: I'm that sick of my life. *Prenny, mes ammy*," said he coolly, in his rude French, to the police, and wrenching one hand free to put it into his pocket; "*prenny mong couteau: c'est avec ça j'ai toué mong hum.*"

It was red and wet.

"You murderous villain!" said Ashton; "the devil helped you better this time. Your wife did not die of her wound."

"Nell—my lass—not dead!" said the wretch, eagerly, and faltering. "I heerd tell——"

"Dead—but not by your hand. Messieurs, for God's sake, take him out of my sight!"

"I didn't kill my lass," said Datchet, trembling and smiling; "thank God!"

To hear him thanking God! and next moment he added, as they hurried him off:

"But I bayn't sorry I done for *he*, my lass liked un too well."

CHAPTER VII.

LES ÉTANGS.

"EDWARD, Uncle Montagu will be here next week. You want a new coat."

"That goes without saying; but the question is——"

"Oh, we can pay for it. There's that paper in the *Revue de Blancheville*."

"—The question is, don't I want new trowsers, *more*? I am only quoting my friend the little tailor here. I met him this morning in my early walk through the village. I generally do, fresh from taking his *goutte* at 'Le Cheval Noir.' In the course of conversation he made that remark, 'Didn't I want a new pair of trowsers?' 'Well,' said I, holding out this leg, with the tender place at the knee, 'it looks as if I did, certainly.' My little tailor gazed at the leg thoughtfully, and said, in quite a friendly serious way, 'I think your *others* are better, sir!' Fancy the fellow knowing what I had got in my drawers! I was immensely tickled. '*Il me semble que l'autre pantalon est mieux, Monsieur.*' Wasn't it delicious? I must tell old Jack."

This conversation took place in the little garden of Maison Dulac, at Les Étangs. Helen had an open letter in her hand, which she had just received from the *facteur*, and which was dated from Hartley Hall. She met Edward, coming down the steps of the pavilion, at the end, mentioned in a previous chapter; he had come out to smoke a pipe in the garden, after writing for three or four hours on a stretch. He and Helen walked about for some minutes, chatting very confidentially, and then they both went up the steps, and entered the pavilion. There was a window at the east end, overlooking a little lake, that mirrored the green banks and red-roofed houses, and blue and white sky—a landscape as pretty and gaudy as a bit of Japan porcelain.

In front of this window a sick man lay on a couch, as cosy as Helen's gentle providence could make it, and on the floor at his side squatted a little boy. Who would have known John Drewe again! Fallen from that grand Herculean vigour of his to this poor ghastly hollow-eyed bedridden skeleton. No, not bedridden now: he was fast recovering; he could use his right hand better every day, and he could get along with a stick somehow, even when left with no better help, which he seldom was. And he could teach his little son, if he could do nothing else yet.

He was putting his pupil through a course of English classics, to improve his knowledge of that tongue; and Johnny was now reading "Jack the Giant-killer" aloud, from a very large-typed dissyllabled edition of that narrative, gorgeously illustrated; being carefully corrected by his father, when the French accent prevailed.

Since that terrible March evening, John Drewe had not earned one farthing. A stroke of paralysis had utterly crippled his right side, and deprived him of articulate speech for several months. He lay like a log, but a live log, to be nourished and nursed, while Edward Hartley did his work—while Edward Hartley worked for them all! When, in two or three days, he had recovered his senses sufficiently to comprehend what had happened to him, and to recollect the bitter beginnings, whereof this seemed the hopeless end, John Drewe's sensations were about as intolerable as a man's with a clear conscience could well be. Dishonour, domestic treachery, and lastly, want, like an armed man, faced him at every turn.

On the day he recovered to this painful consciousness, he became aware of Helen Hartley quietly busy as a young Béguine about his sick-room. But he had not then so much energy, bodily or mental, as would suffice to show that he knew her.

Two or three days more had slipped by in that silent room, before he made a little sign with his left hand, and, when Helen came and stood by his bedside, fixed

his eyes on her with an eager asking look, that her fine perception could not miss the meaning of. She smiled, but gravely, and shook her head. She wished he could rest content a while longer, and comprehend that things, if bad, were not as bad as he thought. But he was not content; he became agitated; and she immediately obeyed the doctor's injunctions to speak plainly, at once, on any subject that troubled his mind.

She put her tender little hand on his twitching fingers.

"You were mistaken," said she, softly, but distinctly. "They were not so guilty as you thought. Be very sure of it—rest on it; thank God for it—I know you will. And please be satisfied with this for to-day, remembering how weak you are—too weak even to listen longer."

She gave him a very kind look, and left him. Her beautiful honest eyes seemed to shed truth like light into the sick man's soul; he believed her assurance at that moment, and rested on it, thanking God, for another day or two. Then a wind of doubt arose, and his feeble flame wavered in it. He made impatient gestures with his left hand, which his agitation rendered all the less intelligible. But Helen, patient and attentive, soon comprehended, and brought him a pencil and paper. She tenderly aided his poor left-handed attempts, and with immense difficulty, and after a considerable time, he had scrawled two words that almost covered the large page:—

"Wife—Letter."

Helen had expected this moment; she was prepared for it. She instantly said,

"May Edward come in?"

First, a startled look, very like horror as well as astonishment; then, as he met Helen's great clear serene eyes, of perplexity; at last, as if resolution had been silently struggled for and gained, a sign of assent. Helen did not leave the bed-side, but smiled, as if thanking him, and told Pauline, who was in the room, to go and ask monsieur to come, and stay herself with *le petit*.

Then Edward, entering, came quickly up to that side of the bed on which Helen stood, with her hand in John's left hand, which had clutched and kept it at the moment Edward appeared. And at the same moment the poor weak invalid shut his eyes, with a groan.

Edward stood there very pale and grave—self-possessed, it is true, but not without the greatest effort to be so that he had ever been obliged to make in his life. And involuntarily, I believe, he laid his hand on his wife's shoulder. So the men unconsciously linked themselves together by the woman, and, in their weakness, found and rested on that strength of hers, which was nothing but love.

"Thank God you're spared, John," said Edward, gently. "I wish, if it is not too painful, you would look at me while I speak a word to you."

Whereat John opened his wan blue eyes, the only live-looking feature of his poor fixed face, and stared, solemnly as an accusing spirit, right into the young man's expressive slate-coloured orbs.

"Thank God you are living to hear me; and God grant me the right words and the power to convince you, John—I swear I have not wronged you as you think: what might have been I dare not say, but I swear I never had the intention to wrong you so deeply. I am not standing here to vindicate myself, but to comfort you all I can, and to ask your pardon. It is my doing that you are lying there—my cursed vanity, and levity, and selfishness—I know that; it is never out of my thoughts; when I look at you I abhor myself, I—God forgive me, God forgive me!—"

There he broke off, struggle as he would, and turned, and pressed down his face on the hand that still rested upon his wife's shoulder, and gave a great sob or two. She looked wistfully at John.

But he, drawing his fingers from hers, impatiently fluttered the paper on which he had scrawled those two words, and which lay on the coverlid.

"Edward," said Helen, "he wants to know about that letter." She did not say "about his wife."

Edward raised his head, quite self-controlled again.

"I have read that letter," said he; "here it is." He put it on a table in John's sight, and a weight on it. "When you are stronger you can read it again yourself, and you will see that there is not a word in it that really implies wrong, beyond the wrong I plead guilty to. Wrong enough, bitter enough for you to read. Believe, John, that I am alone to blame——"

Then, all of a sudden, a painful convulsion wrenched the death-like face, and rent apart, as it were, the sealed lips; and a hoarse, discordant voice that was John's, but quite unlike John's, cried out "*Wife!* ——"

"Tell him," said Edward helplessly, for he was shocked and fairly frightened.

"Your wife is gone to stay with Miss Nettlefold," said Helen; "but she is quite well, and so is your little boy, whom you can hear playing in the next room."

She spoke quite readily and cheerfully, but she dreaded any further questioning. Without a word to any one, Mrs. Drewe had left the house early in the morning after her husband's seizure; and four days after, Helen had received a queer letter from foolish Miss Nettlefold, dated on the Feast of St. Wapps. She announced that poor Susan Drewe had taken refuge with her from her husband's unchristian violence; that she (Miss Nettlefold), understanding the families were intimate, had thought it best to write to Helen, whose grandpapa was her uncle, and request her to inform Mr. Drewe where his wife had found shelter—if, indeed, which she had reason to doubt, he cared to know. Susan, she added, had shown an earnest wish to seek that blessed rest and peace which the Church alone could give a wounded spirit, and to help her in the altar-cloth she was working as a dedicatory offering to SS. Wapps and Natts.

It was evident that Susan had preferred returning to her feast of toads with Miss Nettlefold (who, moreover,

was not at all unmanageable in the absence of her velvet and iron mamma), to remaining with her husband ; sunk irretrievably, as she felt herself, below that confiding love which had made him so easy a husband. Besides, he was likely to be long ill, and they were certain to be poorer than ever. It was evident she had told a touching little story to her protectress, and was cunning enough to trust to the generous forbearance of those she had injured not to contradict it.

Helen was very glad when poor John only sighed deeply, and closed his eyes, too exhausted, by these agitating explanations, for further question or reply.

Edward went softly out of the room, and she was left alone once more by the sick-bed. But in a few minutes Edward opened the door, and gently called her : she went out to him, and he drew her into John's little study, where he had established himself ever since John's illness.

"Sit down, will you, for a little," said he ; "I wanted to speak to you——"

But then he walked about the room without speaking, for about a minute.

"I think he believes me," he said at last, rather abruptly.

"I am sure he does," answered Helen, eagerly, "he is sleeping so calmly ; the expression of his face is quite changed."

"God bless your loving heart !" said Edward, stopping and looking at her. Was it remorsefully ?—was it fondly ? Helen dared not put it in words, even to her fluttering inmost heart. It was that same look which had ruffled her heaven-sent calm on that memorable evening lately.

"But you—you——" Edward continued, "do *you* believe what I swore to John ?"

"Ever since I saw you put your hand on his that night," said she simply. "Was not that what you meant ?"

"And you were satisfied—you are satisfied ?"

"Yes," said Helen, softly.

"You are the sweetest soul!" cried Edward—then broke off. He came to her, and laid his hand caressingly on her head, and stroked her wavy folds of hair before he spoke again; and then it was in a very subdued voice. "My dear wife, I love you and honour you with the whole strength of my heart. I must be bad indeed if you cannot make me a good husband in spite of myself. Helen—Wife—you are not the woman to want a scene of protestations, but—Good God! what have I been about?"

Helen struggled hard; she conquered the impulse to kiss him and cry on his breast: she was rather afraid of him still, and so humbled, poor child, by his indifference, that she dared not strain his love by the "scene" he deprecated. She only covered her face with her hands, and faltered that she was "so very happy!"

"But, Helen," said he, still softly stroking her hair, "you have some deep wrongs to forgive: and can you believe in me for the future?"

"Since I can believe in your love," she said, behind her hands.

"And forgive those deep wrongs of the past?"

"Oh, Edward!" said she, turning up to him the beautiful, generous face streaming with happy tears—"let bygones be bygones, my dear, my dear——" And shyly stole her tender arms about him.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIMPLE SUSAN'S SENTIMENTS.

AND so, since John's illness, Edward had done as much of John's work, in conjunction with his own, as sufficed to support the two little families become one. He ex-

amined the MSS. and literary matters, which, thanks to John's long habits of regular professional writing, were all in order and quite intelligible; he wrote to those publishers and editors for whom John worked, explained the temporary inability of Mr. Drewe to fulfil his own engagements, but promised to finish all he had undertaken with but small delay.

Heavy educational articles; dry treatises on two or three dry subjects; reviews of dull books, biographical notices of uninteresting people; translations of slow German ethics, and sentimental Swiss piety. Such and such like Edward bound himself to supply in John Drewe's name, and was accepted as his substitute.

Nothing difficult to an educated man, but horrible drudgery, real hard labour, the stone-breaking of literature. He was obliged to give up his professorship; it brought in very little money, and took up time that he must employ otherwise. For he had not only to keep John, his child, and servant, but, if possible, John's literary business together for him till, if ever, he could resume it. More than half his time he drudged for John, and the rest he filled to overflowing with his own work, which was so much less distasteful that it appeared like relaxation by contrast. Yet I question if he did not feel cheerfuller when "rowing hard against the stream" in John's heavy boat, than darting easily with the tide in his own skiff. And through it all Helen had helped him, and been his rapid amanuensis, his quick intelligent copyer and corrector of hurried, blurred manuscript; had translated, arranged, and saved him many an hour of that overwork which is the ounce-weight that breaks the back of many a human camel.

But they were very poor, work as they would, and more than ever Edward scouted the idea of accepting money help. None of their friends were likely to know their additional privations. Helen wrote, from her heart, in excellent spirits to her mother, though she had now no time for any but those little letters whose brevity had alarmed the tenderness of both mother and

uncle. They gave up John's lodging at No. 3, and took an additional room for him at No. 30, as soon as he could be carried across the "Place ;" and dismissed their own *bonne*, to be replaced by worthy Pauline, who must not be separated from her *cher petit*.

When summer came they went to Les Étangs for fresh air, and lived cheaply and cheerfully at Maison Dulac. Monsieur Adolphe and his house behaved with much kindness to "les Anglais," as the village called them. Maison Dulac took a special fancy to "cette chère jeune dame," whose simple goodness and kindness they instinctively preferred to the more pretentious sanctity of their former acquaintance, Mrs. Drewe.

Towards the end of the summer, they gave up to "les Anglais," for a trifling consideration, the pavilion at the garden's end, consisting of two rooms, which served them for study and sitting-room. Very poor they were, but young, loving, light-hearted, and right-minded, and bore their poverty gallantly. You have seen how the fastidious Mr. Hartley found laughing matter in his threadbareness that was patent to the village tailor. Yes, very happy they were, when John had begun rapidly to mend: and, above all, when once he had submitted to be worked for till he was well. For then they both felt that he not only forgave Edward, but loved him.

When John got better, he had taken courage, and read that famous, fatal letter once more. And when he had got over the fresh shock of the re-reading, he was probably wiser, if sadder, for realising the worthlessness of the woman who had deserted her child and him; and found it all the easier to give Edward no more than his due share of blame. The letter was not so very long that I cannot find room for it here. Thus it ran:—

"No. 3, Sunday, March —

"DEAREST FRIEND,

"Cousin William is just gone, and I hasten to tell you how miserable I have been all day.

I am sure I am very much to be pitied, living in fear of an ill-tempered, jealous savage of a husband, who would kill me if he suspected that I cared for you ; and Cousin William so cross to me about you, and you looking so cruel about Cousin William ! And I am sure I have done nothing but what was very natural. I think it best, dearest friend, to own that I was engaged to Cousin William when I married John. I found we were to live in the same house with Uncle Pidgely, and I could not bear that. He was in bad health, and I was to nurse him, and he was besides so very vulgar in his manners. I naturally thought I could be happier with John, who *deceived me*. He pretended that he was sure to make a good income, fancying himself so very clever ! but he has always been miserably poor, and I don't believe he can write anything people care to read. He is nothing but a great stupid, round-backed book-worm. My marriage has been quite a sacrifice, I am sure ; and of course when I made Cousin William understand that, he pitied me, though naturally hurt at first. And of course I have been very glad to see him when he came through Blancheville, for he was always very fond of me, and has been very kind since he knew how unhappy I am in my *uncongenial* marriage. And now you learn the *real* truth, I am sure you will be quite satisfied about Cousin William ; for you know, dearest friend, that I *really* care for no one but you, and even Cousin William is *nothing* to me in comparison. And now you know all I have suffered from your *groundless* jealousy and unkindness, I hope you will never again doubt your poor, poor

“MADONNA.”

It is possible that the idea of being associated with Mr. William Pidgely in the tender task of solacing Madonna's existence, and of relieving the tedium of her “uncongenial” lot, during the absence of that pious bagman, helped Mr. Hartley a good deal in his renunciation of the self-sacrificed charmer. Moreover, this

edifying epistle told him the "*real* truth" more plainly than its fair writer had contemplated, and warned Edward that they had certainly arrived at the treacherous green bog which is sure sooner or later to end these love-rambles out of the marriage highway. He would have drawn back, even if hearty remorse and grief had not brought him to that full stop, and resolute wheel round, which, by God's help, was to alter for ever the downward-tending course of his life. On the night he read that letter he wrote six lines to Mrs. Drewe, which, handed to her by Pauline when she awoke from her refreshing nap on the sofa, probably decided her plan of departure in the morning. A plan she put into execution without even kissing her child in his sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

HEARTSEASE.

MR. ASHTON came slowly down the steep lane which led from the little station of Les Étangs into the village. It was a delicate September morning; the high green banks on either hand, and the feathery trees that topped them, were dappled with tender trembling sunshine. There had been heavy rain in the night, and the air was sweet with the rich smell of damp earth and vegetation. A bird was chirruping here and there, and the clear ring of the blacksmith's music helped the cheerfulness of time and scene; but Ashton walked very slowly and sadly down the lane to that long looked-for meeting which was to have been so joyful. For, alas! that meeting seemed quite spoiled, and the joy turned to mourning.

He had left the body of his murdered friend at Calais, and had come to Les Étangs as Robert Hartley's executor, to meet Edward the heir, no less than to embrace his own adopted Helen. Nearly the first house in the village was Maison Dulac. As he looked up and read

the board with the name, and then, going on a step, saw the queer old weather-beaten picture of a cook among his casseroles, on the house-wall, a sturdy Flemish *bonne* came out with a little boy.

To his inquiry she replied—

“Certainly are the English here. Will monsieur please to accompany me there—below?” and she turned back through the house, and led the way across the paved courtyard to the garden. In the garden, in the hop-arbour, there was a group at breakfast, which I need hardly describe; and to which the rough-and-ready Pauline thus abruptly presented Ashton—

“Voilà Monsieur le parent de Madame.”

Nor need I describe that meeting, and its bewildering agitations of joy and horror.

It was presently arranged that Ashton and Edward should start for Calais that evening, in order to accompany the remains of poor Robert, which were to be laid in his dear native earth. Not in the family vault, but in a favourite spot of his, which singularly enough he had pointed out to Ashton, as they strolled about the little churchyard of Hartleybridge on the Sunday he had spent at the Hall.

And long before Ashton left Les Étangs that evening, his heart was at least the lighter of all anxiety concerning the married happiness of “our girl.” He could hardly comprehend how or why any of them had ever doubted it; and had no patience with himself for having cherished an unjust prejudice against this noble young man—chiefly because he had not thoroughly approved of the shape of his head at ten years old.

Edward was to return from England as soon as he had buried poor uncle Robert, to fetch “his family,” as he simply expressed it; and meanwhile Helen was to make all ready to accompany him back to Hartley Hall, at last and indeed to be their life’s home. There was no talk about these arrangements from which John Drewe was excluded. Edward and Helen several times observed that he would soon be well now in his native air—his

accompanying them was not even made a question of. And the poor gaunt convalescent smiled affectionately, with nervous tears in his eyes, acquiescing in all their plans, and taking their love and care of him as a sick brother might. And the noble simplicity with which he received, touched Ashton no less than that with which Edward bestowed, his fraternal devotion.

Before long Ashton knew the worst that could be told of the young man's past life from himself. They sat one afternoon on the bench in that summer-house of the cliff, overlooking the lake, and the Hartley prize view. The young master of Hartley Hall remembered that June evening he had won his wife there: his heart "went sorrowing back through all the faultful past;" and moved by some impulse such as stirred the Ancient Mariner, he opened the blotted pages he had closed, and word by word courageously read his own story to Ashton.

He felt much the better for it; and more comfortable in the continued esteem and regard of one who really knew, now, the man he gave them to.

"Now you know that I am nothing but a poor reforming reprobate," said he; "putting my shoulder to the wheel of my life, and heaving it out of the mud, by God's help."

When I inquired recently what were the latest tidings of the chief personages of this little *drame en famille*, I was told, first,—

That Datchet was brought to England, charged with several crimes committed here, tried, and hanged. He had been skulking about different foreign ports all those nineteen years, earning his bread perhaps honestly, but living on pennyworths of bread to enormous quantities of Geneva—which diet probably fed the native ferocity and monomaniacal vindictiveness of the man. He had been only a few days working on Calais pier when Robert Hartley landed there!

That Colonel Danhaye was still alive, and tolerably likely to live, but that he had sent for his Will, which he had made soon after his daughter went to live with him again, and, in compliance with her entreaty, had added a codicil, which greatly concerns his attached sister, whose name does not occur in the body of the document.

That Simple Susan is residing in Rome with her protectress, and that the charming *dame de compagnie* has become the tutelary saint (on earth) of an eminent cardinal there.

That the Reverend Peter Drewe was greatly shocked and astonished by the bestowal of the Vineyard of Coniscombe on a clerical cousin of his flaxen-headed daughter-in-law, as soon as the consumptive rector, who lingered two or three years, expired. His irritation and displeasure were not at all mitigated by her assurance that the new clergyman was a worthy young man with four young children, who had always looked forward to Coniscombe as the earthly haven where he would come. Nor by the polite intimation, which shortly followed, that Coniscombe was about to be vacated by the family, and undergo extensive repairs; especially as no invitation to accompany the family to Nettlefold House followed this news. The Reverend Peter went to Bath, very much disgusted, and, taking a small apartment there, has finally attached himself to three tolerably rich old ladies, who supply him with very nice dinners and fairish port, on the tacit understanding that he is always available for their sixpenny whist.

That John Drewe got rapidly well, as was predicted, in his native air; and his brother and sister-in-law, hearing of his domestication at Hartley Hall, and either influenced by that circumstance, or by shame, or pride, or tardy remorse, or because he did not any longer want rich friends, at last made overtures of family affection, which resulted in a visit from (reluctant) John at Nettlefold House. And, among his friends, John has got a good Consulship at a pleasant foreign port; and his brain

estate, no longer leased to the rich farmers of literature, seems likely to ripen harvests for his own barns.

That Montague Ashton is building a big bungalow in the west country, between Hartley Hall and the sea ; and, till it is built, is mostly at the Hall, where he finds the active and popular young Squire, his nephew-in-law, the most congenial and sympathising recipient of the crotchety talk his soul loves, that he ever had in his life.

And that there has lately been a joyful christening, in his parish church, of a Robert Hartley, of Hartley Hall, next in succession ; and that on that same summer Sunday our Helen sat down, with her little Christian in her arms, by a grave that is a garden, in the pleasant shady churchyard—gathered a little nosegay of those darkest heartsease that some people call Black Princes, put them in her baby's hat, and told him it was poor Uncle Robert's christening gift.

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